DIMENSIONS OF ASIAN SPIRITUALITY

Zen Koans

STEVEN HEINE

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Editor's Preface

One of the terms from the Zen Buddhist tradition most familiar to the general public in the West is "koan." And it is not surprising that this is so. Everything from the relatively accessible presentations of East Asian Buddhism that date back half a century, written by authors like D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, to television series and films have offered exposures of various levels of sophistication to koans. The Western reader or connoisseur of popular culture may even know the content of some of them in the form of one-line, paradoxical questions such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "What did your face look like before your parents were born?" Perhaps it is even generally acknowledged that, in some elusive way, these koans are supposed, when properly understood, to facilitate an enlightenment experience in the person to whom they are addressed, prompting a sudden realization of either the true nature of the world or its meaninglessness, or maybe even both.

Unfortunately, for Western readers as well as some modern East Asian ones, often little else is comprehended about koans. The Japanese term used to identify these "enlightening enigmas" may mask the fact that they were likely first formulated in the Chinese Buddhist tradition, as well as the degree to which they were studied and encountered in the most existentially serious of ways by Korean Buddhist monastics through the centuries. The extent to which koans represented an incredibly innovative pedagogical technique in the history of Buddhism, emphasizing interaction and transformative interpersonal encounter, often at the expense of doctrinal precedent, may not be obvious in the widely disseminated depiction of these "cases" either. Finally, without an intimate knowledge of East Asian and Buddhist history, cultural symbols and genres of both literature and personal communication, it is hardly surprising that koans will strike those who come across them as ambiguous and elusive, and leave them wondering to what their purposes for life might really amount.

In this contribution to the Dimensions of Asian Spirituality series, Professor Steven Heine of Florida International University offers a lucid and superbly informed overview of the history, meanings, and practices of koans in the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhist traditions. He also delves in the following pages into how the reception and interpretations of koans, in East Asia and the West, have been turned toward the existential, philosophical, and social dilemmas of the modern world. Professor Heine's several decades' worth of scholarship on the many facets and some of the greatest collectors and commentators in the long heritages of koan literature make him an ideal guide for both novices and peers through the multilayered and fascinating genres, settings, and functions that are their legacies. We are confident that the audiences of Dimensions volumes, from the undergraduate student and instructor to the interested layperson and to those immersed in koan learning and practice, will find treasures in this addition to the series.

DOUGLAS L. BERGER

Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to my wife, Therese Sollien. As soon as I met her in 2008, I knew she had already tasted the Zen waters and knew for herself.

I also thank Pat Crosby and Doug Berger for their support and guidance, in addition to Maria Sol Echarren, who assisted in preparing the manuscript and images.

Introduction
The Koan Is My Koan

Koans are pithy, perplexing, and often paradoxical expressions used in various schools of Zen Buddhism to bring a practitioner to the experience of enlightenment. Typically, a koan case involves a spiritual contest between an enlightened master who tests and bests an unenlightened disciple with a clever and insightful saying or probing question, but sometimes the hierarchical roles are reversed so that the disciple is the winner of the contest. In any event, the interplay enables the exchange partner to immediately discern and uproot the causes of his ignorance and to spontaneously gain insight into the true nature of reality beyond ordinary logic or language.

Whereas some koans contain a brief story or more complex narrative, in other instances they are as concise as a cryptic couple of sentences or phrases, thus demanding a reading between the lines to discern their significance. For example, a monk asks Zhaozhou who he is and the master replies, "East Gate, West Gate, North Gate, South Gate." At first, it may seem that the answer deliberately dodges the query and that the point is to reflect on the absurdity of a simple question about a difficult issue. On a deeper level of interpretation, the symbolism refers to traditional structures in China, such as a town, home, or temple compound, which were surrounded by gates to protect the area from intruders. Zhaozhou identifies his inner being with these enclosures in a way that highlights that they not only are barriers keeping people away but can also be seen as openings allowing access to and productive interaction with the outside world. His identity is at once flexible and all encompassing, but his response

also reflects an awareness of the constraints of human perception and the limits of discourse.

Koans, when effective, are said to trigger a sudden awakening that is like the sun bursting through the clouds on a dreary day or a hammer smashing through solid rock. However, koans are not the only method used in Zen training. In order for a koan to have an impact, the trainee must have undergone a prolonged period of practicing meditation and maintaining a strict behavioral code of discipline by studying scriptures and performing daily chores. This is the necessary preparation that steadies the mind through continuing contemplative cultivation. When the effect of the koan takes hold, the experience is compared to a mother hen and baby chick each pecking at the eggshell until it finally opens. Or, in another analogy, it is like filling a cup of liquid to the brim and adding just one more drop so that it spills over. The koan is the catalyst that enables a breakthrough to realization. This experience occurs suddenly, but not quickly in the ordinary temporal sense, in that months or years of development must precede it.

As a prime example of classical East Asian culture, koans often fascinate people in modern Western society for various reasons. In some instances, the level of interest is based on an intense or even passionate quest for knowledge and understanding of mystical truth that involves a high level of engagement on the part of one who is willing to endure challenges and hardships. There are many paths to reaching such a commitment. In some instances, this development may transpire through scholarly research for historical evidence that is undertaken by traveling to remote mountain temples and poring over obscure medieval manuscripts in various libraries and archives. Or it may depend on a personal, existential pursuit that involves training in exotic monastic locations under the tutelage of a mentor, who is often quite severe in giving criticism to the trainee struggling to come to terms with the meaning of assigned koan cases. In other instances, the degree of involvement is more casual. One may become curious about koans as yet another example of a foreign society that has produced so many kinds of intriguing cultural artifacts, such as karate, kimonos, karaoke, and kimchee, to name several of many examples that have become prominent in the past few decades.

I have gone through all three of these stages of interest in reverse order over a lifetime of reflection on koans. Eventually, I published more than a dozen books dealing with koan literature and practice, including a couple of monographs analyzing a single case as well as several anthologies with contributions by leading scholars. The field of koan studies has become at once my vocation and my avocation, and I am grateful every day for the vast storehouse of materials that can be ceaselessly mined for resources to research objectively and to reflect upon subjectively. But the situation was not always this rosy, and it took many years of deepening engagement for such a positive view of koans to unfold within my state of awareness.

As a kid growing up in the 1950s, all things Japanese, from the original *Godzilla* shown on TV to my first Sony pocket-sized transistor radio, charmed me. As my interests became more literary in high school, the question of how American poets, artists, and musicians, especially Beat writers I personally wanted to emulate, like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, were influenced by the simplicity and minimalism of Zen expressiveness caught my attention. In college in the late 1960s, when I majored in Asian religions, the appeal of Zen meditation was as powerful as my revulsion with the war in Vietnam, which in an ironic way helped stimulate my interest in the societies of Asia.

As a graduate student in the 1970s, when I learned to read ancient Zen texts and to appreciate the rigors of monastic discipline, something strange happened in regard to my view of koans. Although I studied many of these as both a researcher and a seeker, I found that what I said to friends and family when they inevitably asked why I wanted to dedicate my life to studying an arcane tradition was that I was fascinated by everything about Zen except koans. I especially loved the role of the arts, including verse, calligraphy, gardening, and the tea ceremony. But koans started to seem overly abstruse and confounding in fostering doubt and uncertainty for their own sakes, yet without offering much scholarly or spiritual benefit.

For me at that stage, koans had become highly problematic. While the point of "Zhaozhou's 'Four Gates'" might be clear enough, other cases, like the famous "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" seemed to lead only to an endless feeling of frustration. This sense is

captured by Franz Kafka's 1919 parable about the futility of power, "An Imperial Message," one of several Kafka works influenced by Asian culture. According to the story, a dying Chinese emperor who lives in a palace located inside the Forbidden City asks a messenger to send a memo to one of his subjects outside the gates. Despite his best effort, the imperial messenger cannot find a way out of the maze of corridors and courtyards in the palace, so the emperor's message will never reach its targeted recipient. Kafka writes, "How vainly does he wear out his strength; still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained."

This was exactly what I felt about working with koans. As in Zeno's paradox regarding the impossibility of movement, it would be impossible ever to reach the desired destination, even with vigorous determination, and I did not feel like I was getting anywhere closer to truth. Nothing was gained or delivered. Then, as my access and approach to the material became more varied and nuanced through additional levels of experience once I became a professor who lectured on the topic regularly, I began to see that my sense of despair was not the source but, rather, the key to the solution of the problem.

The doubt I was undergoing is precisely the kind of emotional turmoil that is required to inspire one to deepen and refine one's knowledge and appreciation of the need for ongoing contemplation without regard to attaining a goal. The koan, I realized, is my koan. I, or my fixation with getting to a certifiable end point, was the underlying cause blocking my path because I was expecting too much and understanding too little. It was time, according to a current saying, to wake up and smell the roses. Working with koans made me realize that understanding there is always more to learn is crucial for gaining insight. As Confucius has said, "Knowing what you know and knowing what you don't know is the key to knowledge."

One of several examples that led to this breakthrough was the following case about Hongzhi, who was known as one of the great collectors and commentators on koans when the tradition was first being formed in twelfth-century China. Like almost all the masters of the classical period in the development of the Zen tradition, he struggled mightily with koan cases before reaching enlightenment.

According to the account of his realization experience, his teacher, master Danxia, asked him, "What was your self before the cosmos began?" Hongzhi answered, "A frog at the bottom of the well swallows the moon; in the middle of the night there is no need to borrow a light." While this response may appear to convey Zen indirection, Danxia was not pleased and remarked, "You haven't got it yet. Try again." Hongzhi was in the process of figuring out something else to say when Danxia hit him with the ceremonial fly whisk and cried out, "But you said you didn't have to borrow anything!" At those words Hongzhi experienced a feeling of great release and bowed in reverence. Danxia then demanded, "Why don't you try to say something else?," and Hongzhi replied, "Today I missed the opportunity and incurred blame." Master Danxia remarked, "I don't have time to hit you. You can go now."

How delightfully ironic, I felt, that when Danxia did not even bother to strike the student when he finally acknowledged his fault, this was the signal of Hongzhi's success. I thought of how my own mentor frequently showed me what is often called in Zen "grandmotherly kindness" by taking great pains to highlight and correct the flaws of my studies, but he would become incommunicative just as I no longer needed to hear his reprimands. He seemed to be following a Japanese saying in regard to a leader's attitude—"You have to be cruel to be kind"—in forcing the trainee to learn for himself.

The story of Danxia's method of teaching further enhanced my new understanding of koans. Danxia once criticized one of his predecessors, who, he said, "only managed to point his finger at the traces of Zen literature and understood it literally. But he was unable to reveal it to others." Today, said Danxia, "I will reveal the truth to everyone! Those who have eyes should clearly recognize it for what it is." Then he struck the ground with his staff loudly and cried out, "Do you see it? A white egret standing in the snow: they are not the same color. The bright moon and flowering reeds: these two do not look alike." According to this passage, the image of a white bird standing in a snowbank does not represent uniformity in a superficial sense, just as the complement of the silver moon and white reed blossoms is also not indicative of mere sameness. These metaphors suggest ways of seeing multiple factors and perspectives in what appears nondistinct

and, by implication, a consistent view of what seems diversified. They aid us in inverting, or turning topsy-turvy, conventional standpoints so that we do not get locked into stereotypical or one-sided ways of thinking.

With such a model of teaching in mind, I do not have the pretense that this book will reveal to the reader the truth of koans. But I do hope that in some small way it can deliver the fundamental message that is crucial to all forms of koan literature and studies, which is to enable those engaged in the topic to taste the water and know for themselves whether it is cool or warm.

Note: The key terms "Zen" (C. Chan, K. Seon), "koan" (C. *gongan,* K. *kongan*), and "zazen" (C. *zuochan*) are used in their more familiar Japanese pronunciations, but otherwise Chinese as well as Korean names and terms are left in their original.

CHAPTER 1

Origins, Functions, and Modern Receptions of Koans

Classic and Contemporary Perspectives

> A monk asked Zhaozhou, "What is the meaning of the first patriarch Bodhidharma coming from the West?" The master replied, "The cypress tree standing in the courtyard."
>
> Koan Case 37, *Gateless Gate* (1229)

Koans from Past to Present

Koans as concise, confusing, and often contradictory sayings expressed by ancient masters serve as the centerpiece of Zen Buddhist learning and training on several levels. First, koans form the central component of a remarkable body of literature contained in voluminous collections produced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These works include various styles of elegant poetic and eloquent prose commentaries on cryptic dialogues like the one involving master Zhaozhou cited at the beginning of this chapter. The koan compilations were very much influenced by, and also greatly contributed to, one of the high points in the distinguished history of the literary tradition in East Asia. The texts appealed to intellectuals in China and Japan as well as Korea, who sought spiritual fulfillment through interpreting elaborate rhetoric related to mysterious metaphysical exchanges.

In addition, koans have long been the main object of attention in Zen meditation. Contemplating koans in Zen Buddhist practice requires reflecting on the significance of an enigmatic conversation to the point of exhausting the capacity of the rational mind and the

expressiveness of speech to comprehend and explain the meaning. In that way, a realm of transcendence beyond ordinary thought and words is disclosed. From the standpoint of meditation, the value of koans is found not in terms of fluent rhetoric. Rather, it is revealed through a drastically abbreviated and cryptic style of discourse that highlights the value of minimal verbiage or even full silence.

There is an underlying link between these seemingly inconsistent approaches to the question of whether the literature should be emphasized and elaborated or, instead, should be abandoned when the use of words detracts and distracts from the path to realization. This important connection is based on the utility of koans as an ideal method for attaining and transmitting an unimpeded experience of enlightenment on multiple levels.

Referred to as "cases," since the term initially derived from the legal precedents of public (*ko*) records (*an*) recognized by the Chinese court system, the puzzling exchanges that constitute the core of a koan make use of an innovative style of rhetoric. The Zen dialogue is supposed to seem absurd at first glance because the link between question and answer is deliberately disconnected or indelibly broken. In the case cited at the beginning of this chapter, master Zhaozhou gives an inscrutable response that further baffles an already confused disciple. Through the seemingly incomprehensible interaction, a profound sense of spiritual significance springs forth.

The creative construction of koan records contained in masterful collections of commentaries and used in rigorous meditative practice was the key factor that enabled Zen to succeed as a thriving religious institution. Zen spread throughout East Asia, especially from the twelfth through the sixteenth century, and has expanded in modern times through dissemination to America as a distinctive religious as well as a more broadly based cultural phenomenon. In the past century, Zen has become a source of inspiration with far-reaching implications for the contemporary era, greatly influencing intellectual and popular culture on both sides of the Pacific.

What provides the bridge between classic developments in the East and their contemporary impact on the West? How did a relatively obscure premodern cultural product launched in faraway mountain landscapes, as refined as this literature was in the original sociohis-

torical context, come to expand so pervasively and have an effect on modern society throughout the world?

The body of koan records has enabled Zen to interface with diverse spiritual traditions in Asia, including other Buddhist as well as Confucian, Daoist, and Shinto forms of practice. This trend continues in America with the expanding role of immigration across the ocean as well as Western travel abroad, especially after World War II, when enthrallment with the Orient as the hub of global cultural and commercial exchange was building. By evoking the depths of existential angst in confronting nihilism and nothingness in a compelling though detached manner, koans have been interpreted through a variety of modern perspectives beyond traditional religious practice, spanning the Kyoto School of philosophy in Japan and Beat literature in the United States. Both movements evoke Zen rhetoric in order to define the meaning of mystical freedom in the modern era.

Through complex cross-cultural exchanges, koan literature now functions in American meditation centers and wide-ranging intellectual arenas, including schools and universities, as well as the fine and performing arts. In these venues, fascination with Zen dialogues used as a means of self-examination and self-realization is vigorously pursued. Koan cases remain a boundless source of discovery for those intrigued by and trying to capture the essence of Eastern spirituality. A key example of recent developments based on the impact of koans is the Beat poetry of Gary Snyder, who eulogized "Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and . . . by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures." Another prominent illustration is the experimental musical composition of John Cage, whose piece *4′33″*, first performed as a classical music recital, consists simply yet profoundly of a four-minute performance by an instrument (originally the piano) that does not play a single note.

Both artists studied koan literature in a formal way during the 1950s. For Snyder this involved training at a temple in Kyoto and for Cage it was done through an association with D. T. Suzuki, the eminent disseminator of Zen in America since the late nineteenth century. Another notable figure who traveled to Asia and practiced

Zen with a Japanese meditation teacher in California is Steve Jobs, the tech wizard of Apple. Jobs pioneered an approach based on controlling every aspect of production he called "the whole widget," which greatly resembles a notion of total transformation used in some of the major koan collections and referred to as the "complete working" or the "complete activity."

In a commencement speech given at Stanford University in 2005 and in other forms of self-expression, Jobs acknowledged indirectly the influence of the koan training he underwent during a challenging period in his life in the 1980s on his distinctively creative style of entrepreneurship known in a famous ad as "Think different!" When he died in 2011, several Buddhist priests in Japan who knew his Japanese meditation teacher quickly published books about Jobs's achievements in relation to his long-standing interest in Zen. This example makes it clear that the inspiration provided by koan cases either greatly influences or can be constructively compared to a variety of classical and contemporary perspectives in both the traditional East and modern-day West.

The modern period of appropriating Asian culture can be characterized as "*K* stands for kabuki, kimono, . . . and koan." Many aspects of ancient Asia, such as kabuki as a form of traditional theater, kimono as a full-length garment, karate as a martial art, and karma as a concept of moral retribution—using for now just examples that start with the letter *K*—are exemplary of the pattern. There seems to be a strong sense of familiarity in that these terms have been integrated into daily vocabulary in modern America, whether understood properly or not. Karaoke as a style of public singing, kung fu as a Chinese martial arts form, and kimchi as a spicy Korean delicacy are additional examples that come to mind of *K* words reflecting well-accepted if highly adapted Asian customs. These three phenomena can be accessed easily at the local strip mall or purchased in a supermarket. All the traditional Asian customs are available through online resources, including how-to guides or other explanatory materials. However, this may be a mixed blessing by fostering acceptance but also reducing complex historical methods to either a convenient commercial commodity or a quaint historical oddity.

In contrast, the terms "kimono" and "kabuki" refer to seemingly obsolete cultural products that are known primarily through their display on special occasions, whereas "karate" and "karma" are often extracted from and applied in varying ways outside their traditional setting. The Zen koan stands somewhere in between these levels of appropriation. On the one hand, for those who are knowledgeable of the practice, studying koan records is widely respected as a demanding training technique used by religious specialists. Many months or years of determined preparation and persistent dedication are required to master the meditative program.

Despite all the acclamation and fanfare, the term "koan" is sometimes used rather casually in everyday conversation. It is said to indicate a troublesome concern or conundrum, or an effort to try to resolve puzzling circumstances in one's personal existence. For example, someone facing an intractable problem from which he or she hopes to learn a life lesson may say about the challenge, "That's my koan." It is true that the term can suggest an existential riddle that needs to be solved in order to gain liberation from an emotional syndrome, but this is only a part of the whole picture of its formation. If taken by itself, that implication may represent a misunderstanding of the legitimate historical background and spiritual functions of Zen writings.

One wonders to what extent the concepts that the term "koan" is supposed to convey, based on the actual social context of China, where it originated and flourished a millennium ago, are clearly comprehended. How much is known about the authentic purpose and meaning of koans seen in relation to other recently adopted Asian cultural components? Or is the koan just one more contemporary cultural fad that is essentially bereft of its real significance? Perhaps there is a kind of "pizza effect" at work in that the American version might not even have been recognized, let alone approved, by the creators back in the old country.

As the term has become more commonly used, its purpose, like that of many aspects of traditional Asian culture adopted in recent years in the West, is often taken for granted as being opaque and is therefore left unexamined. That tendency falls back on old stereotypes and generalizations without a careful investigation of their

ramifications. Koans are often reduced to a commodity in a way that delimits rather than promotes a genuine understanding of their innovative functions. As an indicator of the extent of the diffusion of Zen writings and practices to America, an eager student showed me recently how to purchase a "Zen koan" app for my new iPhone. On downloading this for free, I quickly realized that the list of daily sayings it provides, as with fortune cookies that supposedly contain Confucius's words of wisdom, do not necessarily derive from classic koan literature per se.

This book seeks to set the record straight by analyzing the classic background of texts and rites while exploring the contemporary significance of koan cases so as to remain true to, yet also constructively critical of, the full implications of this ongoing tradition. By investigating history carefully, we will be able to delve more deeply into the inner structure of koan literature and uncover and interpret profound levels of metaphorical significance. These need to be explored in order to form an authentic appreciation of this unique approach to spirituality. The aim is to penetrate the veil of vagueness and inscrutability in order to clarify the story behind the story in understanding how koan writings have been used in premodern East Asia and are now coming to be known and implemented in modern America.

My primary goal is to explain the ramifications of—and, thereby, help close—the apparent gap between what koans say on the surface, which seems impenetrable, and what they suggest between the lines, which bears multiple layers of symbolic import. I accomplish this by examining the historical and philosophical context as well as the rhetorical and ritual functions of case records. The analysis is based on an inversion of interpretation. It recognizes that the simpler the dialogue appears, the more complicated it probably is, and that the greater the sense of bewilderment it causes, the more profound are the connotations awaiting detection.

To achieve this objective, I examine and evaluate the formation as well as the discursive and practical aims of the vast body of koan literature in terms of the spiritual implications of prominent examples of the contemplative exercises. The methodology, which is discussed in more detail in the following chapters, focuses on two main facets

of the religious themes expressed in koan records. One involves "transformation," or the level of individual religious attainment, and the other is "transmission," or the role dialogues play in maintaining order in the monastic system. Exploring these elements as distinct yet interlocking levels of meaning reflected in different case records stored in major collections helps make sense of the seemingly nonsensical. The analysis disentangles the tangled web of words used in Zen exchanges stemming from the vast creative wellsprings of East Asian literature and culture of more than a thousand years ago.

Defining a Koan Case

Koans, which by definition are never what they appear to be, should be looked at from various angles. The need to explore multiple perspectives for understanding Zen dialogues is signified by a couple of traditional tools that East Asian artists have used in portraying the natural world. One is the Nine-Turn (or Zigzag) Bridge that is found in most landscape gardens in China and Japan, which enables the viewer to see the waterway from different positions. Another is painting based on the Eight Views of a Landscape, which are depicted from the vantage point of a pagoda or some other octagonal lookout. In these ways of taking in the surroundings, the human perception of reality is considered to be partial and fragmented. But by gathering and integrating various limited perspectives, the analysis is capable of gaining a comprehensive sense of the whole.

In the case of the cypress tree cited above, Zhaozhou responds to a bold but too general and open-ended inquiry posed by an overly excited novice about the origins of the Zen sect supposedly founded by Bodhidharma. The quasi-mythical first patriarch, a renowned meditation master in his native country, decided to leave India sometime during the sixth century in order to spread his teaching to China. Many koans begin with this frequently asked query or may use a similar one, such as, "What is Buddha?" as in cases 18 and 21 in the *Gateless Gate.* In these instances, an unenlightened partner in the conversation raises a question that is too imposing to be answered directly, even by a wise leader.

In other examples, the lead-in may be a simple but straightforward inquiry posed by the enlightened master, such as "Who are

you?" or "Where are you from?" Such queries are intended to probe the disciple's background in terms of what style of practice and with which teacher he has heretofore studied. They offer an opportunity for the trainee to express himself, if he dares. Additional instances find the master challenging the disciple with a query that cannot be answered, as with *Gateless Gate* case 38, "A buffalo is pushed through an open window. The head, horns, and four legs all go through, but why cannot the tail pass through?"

Whether prompted by the master or the disciple, in koan dialogues the interlocutor who has a deficient understanding is rendered speechless or receives a sharp reprimand, or both. Answerability of the core question and the capacity of discursive interplay to disclose truth directly are deliberately and provocatively placed in grave doubt by the wiser party. The unenlightened partner is forced to be more introspective and thoughtful. He is made to probe his assumptions, and the humiliation and anxiety or even exasperation or desperation suffered by undergoing a "great ball of doubt" functions as an essential stage in the process of casting aside illusions.

The author of the *Gateless Gate* refers to this state of mind as being like someone trying to swallow a red-hot iron ball that cannot be ingested or spit out. Other typical images evoked in koan collection commentaries are that of a rat trapped in a corner, someone being chased by his or her worst enemies without mounting a defense, or someone getting gnawed at by a rabid dog that will not back down. Feeling a deep sense of doubt is also referred to as the "Zen illness" or the "malady of meditation." This condition can cause physical symptoms, such as cold feet, shortness of breath, a ringing in the ears, stomach cramps or vomiting, sleeplessness, and intense perspiration. Some of these indications have been associated with either the diagnosis of tuberculosis or an underlying panic that may be accompanied by hallucinations suggesting the onset of what today would likely be called a nervous breakdown. But how and why, in the course of their development in Chinese and Japanese Zen practice, did koans come to serve this function of facilitating existential breakdown and a subsequent enlightening breakthrough? To resolve that matter in an appropriately intricate way, let us look briefly at the

history of the koan tradition to see how Zhaozhou's response reveals diverse levels of meaning.

The cypress tree dialogue is one of the most famous of the hundreds of cases that were included in seminal koan collections and numerous other classic sources composed in China. The corpus of texts, consisting of compilations of dialogues with extensive commentaries and instructions for guiding contemplation, originated well over a thousand years ago in rugged and remote monasteries. Koans have their roots in the Tang dynasty (618–907), which was the golden age of Chinese Buddhist philosophy and art. As the oral teachings of irreverent teachers who often clashed with the authority of tradition, the cases were not recorded at first. By the time of the advent of mass woodblock publishing during the Song dynasty (960–1279), which was strongly supported by a government that promoted the aesthetics of literature as a way of creating social unity, koan records emerged full-fledged. They were considered a highly refined form of writing that was also a uniquely powerful tool for developing inner awareness, and they spread rapidly to Korea and Japan, where they were further refined and developed in varying ways.

The interaction between Zhaozhou and his anonymous disciple is exemplary of the first stage in the flourishing of koan practice. During the ninth and tenth centuries, the Zen school was still a fledgling, loose-knit religious movement occupying mainly southerly districts, while the capital, the seat of power, was situated in the north. However, when Zhaozhou became a master at the age of eighty, after years of studying in the south, his temple, which today is one of the main examples of a revival of Buddhism in post-Mao China, was located in a fairly remote northern district several hours' train ride from present-day Beijing. Zen was not well organized or fully recognized by the imperial establishment. As part of a young upstart ideology, Zen masters included in Zhaozhou's lineage maintained that Buddhist scriptures were meaningless. Their innovative method of pedagogy was based on highlighting the acumen of teachers, who portrayed themselves as living Buddhas based on the prowess of their ingenious verbal expressions and nonverbal actions.

The "mad monks" of the Tang dynasty were often the strictest disciplinarians when it came to enforcing monastic regulations, although they were generally far more ambivalent about the stringency of moral principles. In their training of followers, early Zen masters used unconventional techniques that showed disdain for old-fashioned doctrine or conventional social structure in pursuit of a sudden, unmediated breakthrough to transcendence. The exploits of impudent masters quickly gained them a reputation for deliberately defying and vilifying the tried yet hopelessly tired ways of cultivating followers based on studying sutras or practicing rites of repentance. Both techniques were considered external mechanisms that obstructed rather than fostered genuine interior spiritual learning.

Eccentric and deliberately blasphemous Tang Zen teachers rather boldly resorted to evoking "strange words and mysterious deeds," such as shouting at or slapping their disciples or, in some cases, being assaulted by a brazen though proven protégé. In other instances, masters tormented followers with indecipherable adages like Zhaozhou's non sequitur regarding the cypress tree or a master stating in *Gateless Gate* case 9 with deliberate redundancy that the reason someone did not attain Buddhahood "was because they did not become a Buddha."

To what extent these actions really took place in Tang dynasty society or, instead, represent a literary conceit that was invented or at least exaggerated retrospectively by Song dynasty compilers of koan collections has been a matter of scholarly debate over the past few decades. Modern historical studies in Asia and the West have tried to shed light on the hagiographical—that is, pseudo-historical in the sense of being greatly romanticized and idealized—atmosphere and content of many traditional accounts. These records pose as biography, emulating Chinese historical records of government officials, but are filled with myth, legend, and lore instead of pure facts. In recent years, deromanticized scholarly reconstructions of portraits of the life of Zhaozhou and other masters have become prominent in academic studies of Zen.

Regardless of the degree to which historicity can be verified, the religious ideal expressed in Zen narratives is that disciples are instructed that they must learn to "kill the Buddha," according to

the saying of master Linji, instead of being guided through the repetitious exercises of reciting passages or chanting prayers, if the Buddha is understood as an exterior deity instead of symbolic of a spiritual force within the person. Rather than an elevated figure to be revered and worshipped, some koans indicate that the Buddha is no different from a humdrum thing like a rice cake, three pounds of sesame seeds, or even something as lowly as a dried dung stick; the last two phrases are answers that appear in *Gateless Gate* cases 18 and 21, respectively.

Trainees are also told to rip up the scriptures as a source of attachment or be willing to hang from a tree where they are taunted by queries (case 5) or to leap off a hundred-foot pole to a precipice below (case 46), if that is what it takes to pursue the truth with full determination and persistence. All these approaches focus attention away from the externality of sacred deities and icons and toward the interiority of self-discovery as the centerpiece of the religious journey. This is done in order to bring forth and actualize a realization of the innate potentiality of authentic Buddhahood that is harbored, but generally not realized, within each and every person. Koan collection commentaries often point to the self as the true arbiter of religious truth claims.

This kind of radical teaching aroused disciples' minds from the dogmatic slumber of deficient behavioral habits and mental complications that had blocked the path to attaining religious awareness unrestricted by ordinary ways of thinking and speaking. Because Zen masters highly prized the rhetorical power of spontaneous spoken delivery over and above the dryness of the written word, koan exchanges that took place during the Tang dynasty were for the most part not recorded or interpreted in published form until a later period.

By virtue of their ingenious stylistic qualities, Zen dialogues are generally considered to represent one of the most captivating though enigmatic forms of spiritual expression found among world religious traditions. These include similar examples of incongruous discourse evident in various mystical schools of thought, such as Gnosticism (Christianity), Kabbalah (Judaism), Sufism (Islam), Advaita Vedanta (Hinduism), and Daoism (Chinese religions). Absurdities as well as paradoxical assertions that equalize apparent opposites or replace

negation with affirmation, the metaphysical with the concrete, life with death, or good with evil, and vice versa, abound in the sayings of Zen masters as well as the transcendental writings of different kinds of mysticism.

One example of a seemingly unanswerable Zhaozhou query reads, "All things return to the one source, but to what does the one return?" While this has left countless Zen trainees stymied, the authentic response may well be provided by the sayings of Christian mystics. For example, the medieval German religious thinker Meister Eckehart writes, "The eye with which I see God is the very same eye with which God sees me." Also, the early modern English poet William Blake suggests, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it really is, infinite."

Zen Buddhism has long characterized its religious undertaking as a "special transmission outside the teachings, without reliance on words and letters," in order to emphasize the need to eliminate altogether any dependence on verbiage. A number of koans, such as cases 40 and 43 in the *Gateless Gate,* capture this view through a pattern of demanding, "Here's a water pitcher, and so tell me what this is without either calling it a pitcher or not calling it a pitcher." The commentator on case 43 insists, "You cannot use words and you cannot not use words." This saying can also be translated as, "Don't speak and don't remain silent!" In the narrative of the case about the water pitcher, the winner of the competition is a monk who says nothing but instead kicks over the vessel. Rather than being scolded for this, he is rewarded with his own temple to lead.

Another example is perhaps the most famous koan, "We know the sound of two hands. What is the sound of one hand clapping?" This inquiry was devised by the great Zen reformer Hakuin in eighteenth-century Japan as an alternative introductory case to be used in the early phases of training monks. That development shows that the formation of cases has been an ongoing process that should not be considered limited to ancient China. One might then wonder what koans are now being created. Perhaps they can be found in playwright Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or the *Seinfeld* TV "show about nothing." This topic is discussed further in the final chapter, which

considers current and possible future directions for continuing to develop the koan tradition.

Mysterious, unanswerable Zen queries leave the disciple reeling in the double bind of a damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't situation. These queries are designed to create a profound sense of despondency, forcing the emergence of a new attitude that does not depend on ordinary language and reaches beyond logical thought in order to escape from mental anguish. According to a Zen saying, the greater the sense of doubt undergone, the greater the breakthrough experience of enlightenment, which means that heightening the degree of angst is a necessary step in the spiritual path.

Despite taking precautions against misuses of speech, it can be said of Zen along with a number of other mystical traditions that nobody likes to talk more about any topic than spiritual adventurers do in regard to the exalted role of ineffability and silence. Mystics representing various schools of thought mentioned earlier have produced enormous amounts of literature extolling the need to jettison rhetoric. As the anonymous medieval English author of the *Cloud of Unknowing,* a work of Christian mysticism, has said, "Dismiss every clever or subtle thought no matter how holy or valuable. Cover it over with a thick cloud of forgetting." Zen was certainly no exception to this trend. This led the koan tradition to develop many kinds of rhetorical devices that reveal and amplify the core literary unit of the dialogue by using words to point beyond words, like ordering from a menu but eating the food. The main point about Zen literary production is an understanding that silence, which comes in varying shades ranging from purposeful reticence to unmotivated aphasia, is but one more tool in the mystic's arsenal that is rarely, if ever, intended to be understood as an end in and of itself.

Classic Koan Collections

As a result of various sociopolitical changes that accompanied the breakdown of the Tang dynasty and consequent decentralization of the government, Zen and other Buddhist schools went through a rather fallow period in terms of institutional and literary development that lasted over a century. A suppression of all foreign religions

by a maniacal emperor in the 840s led to the destruction of many temples, the laicizing of monastics, and the burning of libraries. However, once Buddhism reemerged as an important force in society beginning around 1000, it was Zen that led the way as the main religious school, with the publication of koan collections as one of the main tools for enhancing dissemination to a wide audience of monks and well-educated lay followers, who greatly enjoyed this literature.

Well over a hundred years after the time of their creation, cryptic dialogues attributed to Tang masters were published, at first sporadically but then at an accelerated and more systematic pace. In the massive body of writings from the Song dynasty, koan cases were embellished with elaborate commentaries. The texts form a remarkably rich literary resource of mystifying materials that dazzle the reader with rhetorical flourishes featuring wordplay, misdirection, duplicity, oxymoron, and tautology. These inventive discursive devices are evoked to convey a sense of irony that triggers a transcendental level of awareness by transforming the mind of the trainee and thereby allowing him to be a vehicle for transmitting truth to chosen successors.

It is sometimes said that there are 1,700 case records, but historical research shows that this is a misnomer based on legends that have been oft repeated in various sources, including some contemporary scholarly works. In fact, there are more than five thousand instances of Zen dialogues that can be considered koans, but at the same time there are a couple of hundred cases that are the most widely circulated and utilized in training programs. Yet, each one of these may have dozens of important commentaries so that the body of materials surrounding a brief dialogue can be quite ample.

In some training traditions, disciples are assigned a sequence of cases to be studied from the most introductory to the most advanced level. Each of these koans is accompanied by follow-up or checking questions, which are used to certify that the trainee's degree of understanding is sufficient and that he will not likely suffer a setback. Pushing a trainee on to a new stage of study before he is fully ready, as what we call the Peter Principle, would be counterproductive. In other teaching styles, especially in the Korean Zen's tradition of practice, only a small handful of cases, or even just a single case, is

studied over a prolonged period of time until it is completely mastered and results in the attainment of enlightenment.

The initial great and still the most complex and lengthy of the major Song dynasty koan collections in terms of content and structure is the *Blue Cliff Record,* published in 1128, which contains prose and verse comments on a hundred case records. In this work, editor Yuanwu provides an extensive discussion of each case, including an innovative hybrid (prose-poetic) form of commentary known as capping phrases, which are inserted into every line of the dialogue. These remarks are on cases that were initially selected and given poetic comments in 1038 by Xuedou, a brilliant monk-literatus who was one of the first creators of koan records. The multiple layers of allusion evoking diverse writings produced by previous Zen and other Buddhist and non-Buddhist Chinese literary sources makes the *Blue Cliff Record* a fascinating collection worthy of being endlessly explored. This text has generated scores of volumes of interpretative comments by Zen leaders.

Another similarly organized koan collection is the *Record of Serenity,* published in 1224. This work contains Wansong's prose and capping-phrase remarks on a compilation of a hundred cases, with verse comments, initially selected by the renowned master Hongzhi, recorded about sixty years before. The *Blue Cliff Record* is associated with the Rinzai (C. Linji) school and the *Record of Serenity* with the Soto (C. Caodong) school. Although the two branches are generally seen as highly competitive and sometimes oppositional, in part because government supervision in both China and Japan at times encouraged or demanded maintaining discrete sectarian identities, the viewpoint expressed in the two classic koan collections is actually quite similar.

The single best-known koan collection that crossed denominational and national divisions is the *Gateless Gate,* published in 1229, which includes remarks on forty-eight cases by master Wumen. This text uses a much more streamlined approach to commentary, with brief but evocative prose and poetic remarks on each case. It does not contain capping phrases, but some of the commentary has the same kind of ironic effect. The collection was brought to Japan a couple of decades later and has remained a mainstay of Zen literature ever

since. Representatives of both the Rinzai and Soto schools have continually consulted the *Gateless Gate* for many centuries, although it is generally thought to be linked to the former sect.

The turbulent but culturally productive decade of the 1220s, when Genghis Khan died following twenty years of immense conquests, was a very important time in koan history involving all of East Asia. In addition to the major Chinese collections from that period, in 1226 the Korean master Hyesim, who was the successor to Jinul, the first great Zen philosopher in that country, produced a collection of more than a thousand cases with commentaries culled from Chinese sources. This compilation, the thirty-volume *Collection of Prose and Verse Comments on Cases,* remains the mainstay of Korean Zen that is used as the basis for practice today. Unlike many other Korean monks, Jinul never went to China but greatly admired Zen teachings and abandoned his Huayan school background once he discovered these. Hyesim's collection was expanded to include 1,463 cases, with additional interpretative remarks in the *Explanation of Prose and Verse Comments on Cases* by Hyesim's disciple Gag'un. Since little is known about Gag'un's life—he may have been an immediate follower or he may have lived up to several generations later—the text cannot be dated but is often linked to the thirteenth century.

Furthermore, the Japanese Soto school founder, Dogen, visited China, where he actively studied koan records for four years, from 1223 to 1227. This was one of the first main contacts between China and Japan since the development of koans in the Song dynasty. For a couple of centuries, political affairs had prohibited travel. Dogen was said to have transmitted the *Blue Cliff Record* in a version that was, according to legendary accounts, transcribed in one night before his departure. Ten years later, once he had returned to Japan and established a new temple for training disciples in meditation, which was among the earliest Zen institutions in Japan, Dogen created his own influential koan collections. In the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* he used a distinctive style of commentary by merging Chinese sources with Japanese vernacular expressions.

The classic koan collections in their original form are available today in encyclopedia-sized books stored on library shelves or in digital collections that enable word searches using Chinese charac-

ters, an invaluable tool for the modern researcher. There are quite a few recent translations into Western languages of some prominent works. Both the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Record of Serenity* are available in English in complete and abridged versions. The volume *Two Zen Classics,* by Katsuki Sekida, is notable for containing translations of the *Gateless Gate* and *Blue Cliff Record* (the rendering of the latter is partial) in one handy volume accompanied by the translator's insightful remarks about the symbolism of particular passages.

Because of the relative simplicity of its organization and the tremendous popularity it has enjoyed over the centuries in Japan, the *Gateless Gate* is clearly the favored collection in the West today. There are more than a dozen viable translations both in print and online, and East Asian scholars and priests publish many modern editions every year. Some of the main English translations are by two Japanese monks, Yamada Koun and Zenkei Shibayama, while other editions are by noted translators of Zen materials, including the American Zen teacher Robert Aitken and Thomas and J. C. Cleary. Given the accessibility of the collection for English readers interested in learning more about koans, the *Gateless Gate* is used as the primary basis for this book. Nearly all the examples of koans cited herein are selected from its pages (originally, scrolls), so that these records can readily be cross-checked with other reference works. However, the interpretations as well as categorization of cases into different narrative styles and themes are my own.

By the time of the Song dynasty, Zen had become an expanding monastic institution situated at the forefront of Chinese civil society. The government promoted the production of koan collections as a way of encouraging harmony through spiritual creativity. The teachers who remarked on or used koans in their training programs were patronized by some of the era's leading secular intellectuals. Those lordly figures aspired to the serenity of self-actualization gained through interactions with clerics and a sharing of intense interest in the composition of regulated poetry. For several centuries, Zen became the dominant religious movement in China, in spite of competition from other forms of Buddhism as well as Confucianism and Daoism. The mystical power of koans played a major role in achieving this status.

The trend continued as Zen spread to Korea through the efforts of Jinul and Hyesim in the thirteenth century, along with dozens of their followers, especially master Taego, who traveled to China in the fourteenth century to enhance his awakening experience. Unlike the case of Japan, for which interaction with Chinese Buddhism had been rather limited since the time of the travels of the Tendai school monk Ennin in the ninth century, when the pilgrim witnessed a government suppression of Buddhism, many Korean monks had been in and out of China for a long period. They were exposed to and no doubt participated in Zen practice there during the Song dynasty. One of the most important texts of the period, the *Records of the Patriarch's Hall,* was lost in China but preserved and found in Korea in the twentieth century, thus indicating that Korean monks were playing an important role. However, it was not until around the time of Jinul's death in 1210 that the Zen school was embraced in Korea.

After extensive travels, Taego returned to his native country to reinvigorate Zen learning and training during a period of the decline of Buddhism, which was due in part to Mongol intrusions and other aspects of political turmoil and which contrasted with Confucianism's increased strength. Taego produced some of the greatest poetry and koan commentaries in the history of the tradition, along with letters to lay disciples. Through the efforts of the great early leaders, Zen koans became the main technique used for training advanced monks in Korea, and, as in China and Japan, these were also frequently used in instructions given to lay followers.

Zen was also transmitted to Kamakura-era (1185–1600) Japan during a transitional period in the thirteenth century when a peaceful society had disintegrated and warriors rather than aristocrats were rapidly becoming the new political leaders and educated class. At this time, a vigorous exchange of monks took place between the two countries, while some of the Japanese priests were closely affiliated with prominent warlords. Dogen was said to have used koans as well as Zen poetry when he was invited in 1247 to visit to try to console the shogun Hojo Tokiyori, who apparently felt guilty about his violent military actions and sought consolation through Zen teachings. However, Dogen rejected the shogun's invitation to lead a new proposed Zen temple and returned to his mountain temple. Next,

the shogun offered the position to a prominent master from China, who on his arrival insisted that the monks in Japan must learn to be conversant with Chinese literature, including the *Gateless Gate* and other koan collections.

While Zen was enhanced by the transition in the Song dynasty from a culture based on military prowess (C. *wu,* J. *bu*), or the sword, to one based on literary achievement (C. *wen,* J. *bun*), or the brush, Kamakura Japan was undergoing the reverse movement, from a society based primarily on using ink to one keyed to the role of weaponry. It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword, and the appeal of koan literature highlights this point. With the approval of the rising samurai class, who appreciated the mental discipline gained through koan studies and developed ways of applying this to their combat strategies, Zen functioned for several centuries as a kind of state religion in Japan that surpassed the influence of other sacred orders, such as the Tendai school of Buddhism and Shinto.

Therefore, learning cases had a tremendous impact throughout East Asian societies. The influence of koan collections reached way beyond the temple grounds. It extended to the cultural boulevards of the major cities as well as the hidden passageways occupied by powerful political leaders. Part of the appeal of the classic koan compilations is that they were summative of the main teachings and pedagogical styles of then current Chan lineages that originated in the Tang dynasty. Hundreds of years of philosophical development were condensed into these volumes in a complex and thought-provoking way. Another key feature is that the sophisticated literature encouraged an interactive approach because nothing was to be taken at face value. The collections were usually the result of sermons presented by a commentator to his disciples, who had the opportunity to question or challenge the master's interpretations, which were further refined and polished through editing before being recorded.

One of the main aims of a master's discussions with followers was to come up with alternative responses to the core queries of dialogues; these responses were justified because of the way they teased out diverse perspectives embedded in the source passage's manner of expression. This practice was helpful in stimulating and testing a trainee's level of understanding of a case by forcing him to make it his own

through an original creative interpretation reflecting an authentic level of self-awareness and true sense of inner peace.

Even though it is easy to see how missionaries and some early Western scholars doing research on Zen may have had this confusion about the function of cases, koans are for the most part not used as a kind of catechistic exercise where answers are subject to rote learning techniques, as this would eliminate the need for spontaneous insight. On the one hand, memorization and being tested about the anecdotes of previous leaders of their lineage as a form of religious instruction does appear to resemble the role that catechism plays in some forms of Christianity. However, the koan method is quite different because the emphasis is on developing innovative interpretation whereby the trainee demonstrates through either words or gestures his own inner understanding. Zen mentors' constant refrain is: "Think and speak for yourself without relying on mimicking the words of others." Imitating others is labeled "phony" or the "slobber of wily foxes," an approach whereby the trainee pretends and sometimes deceives others into thinking he is knowledgeable. As indicated by the concluding passage of *Gateless Gate* case 23, the state of genuine self-awareness, free of artifice, is like drinking water and knowing for yourself with full confidence whether it is cool or warm.

The koan tradition is by no means uniform; nor is it unaffected by shifts in perspective or contested areas of ideology. Different techniques for using koans were formulated by various branches of Zen. This disparity often led to discord, disputes, and sometimes heated debates about the relation between language and meditation in terms of evaluating the merits of speech versus silence. The Rinzai and Soto schools in China and Japan, as well as various factions and sublineages within them, have strenuously argued these issues over the centuries. Opponents often said nasty things of one another by using terms like "devils" and "heretics," although the words were probably often meant in a disingenuous or tongue-in-cheek fashion.

Another area of lively discussion has concerned the possibility of syncretism involving Zen's self-power reliance on koan training and the nianfo (J. nembutsu) practice of reciting the efficacious name of the Buddha. This technique for gaining enlightenment was used by

the "other-power"-oriented Pure Land school of East Asian Buddhism, which seems in so many ways to be opposite to the "self-power" approach of Zen. The Pure Land practice of chanting incessantly the Buddha's name, whether out loud or by keeping the sound on the tip of one's tongue, was done to gain the salvific favor or grace of Amitabha (J. Amida) Buddha. As an easy formula to memorize and repeat, the chanting of the nianfo/nembutsu, a term that literally means "Think of Buddha," thus suggesting a form of contemplation, became a strong rival to complex Zen dialogues for gaining the attention of lay followers, who may not have had the time or motivation to read exhaustively through the expansive koan literature.

A new case asking the question, "Who Is the Reciter of the Buddha's Name?" was designed to bridge the gap between the Zen and Pure Land schools. This case was used for centuries and was, in particular, advocated by the great modern Chinese master Xu Yun, who led a revival of Zen practice that continued through the early years of Mao's rule. The koan about nianfo/nembutsu remains a popular form of practice today, especially at temples in China and Taiwan as well as in the Obaku sect of Japanese Zen, which originated in the seventeenth century with masters who had migrated from China during a phase of political turmoil. However, other scholars have demonstrated that since the time of the Ming dynasty, the practice of Chan koan meditation combined with Pure Land Buddhism, as represented by the Obaku approach to Zen in Japan, has been the main tradition in most of the Chinese Zen monasteries as well. There are some exceptions in China, but this is the reason for claims that Japanese and Korean Zen monasteries have better preserved the traditional style of Chinese Zen.

A Tree by Any Other Name

In the cypress tree dialogue, Zhaozhou does not answer forthrightly and changes the topic through making an utterly mundane assertion in response to a theoretical query. This serves to disarm conceptual fixations or delusions reflected in the question by upsetting and reorienting the disciple's expectations. Taken aback, the inquirer may feel upset and frantic, but this forces him to reconsider the import of his inquiry through self-reflection that leads out of the travails of

ignorance and opens the gate to a new level of understanding as the basis for spiritual awakening.

How do we understand the meaning of Zhaozhou's strange reply? Why does the master conjure the symbolism of the cypress tree in order to stimulate the disciple's awareness? Does this object have special significance or does the use of the phrase indicate that the response is deliberately arbitrary in order to deflect an inauthentic query?

All Zen factions agree that dialogues like Zhaozhou's strange reply to his disciple's seemingly innocent question defy reason based on clarifying causal relations in order to overcome ordinary uses of language that are limited to describing so-called objective reality. A leap outside conventional standpoints is undertaken brashly so as to trigger an interior realization that culminates in the attainment of a holistic worldview. The enlightened subjectivity of the religious practitioner, reached after long hours spent pondering such a purposefully quixotic case, represents a lofty outlook that transcends everyday thought and speech. As Wumen's comment states, "If you understand Zhaozhou's answer firsthand, there is no Shakyamuni [the historical Buddha] from before and no Maitreya [the mythical future Buddha] to come." This means that you yourself are the Buddha right here and now, without any need for reverencing supernal beings of the past and future.

Seen in that vein, the cypress tree is mentioned by Zhaozhou not, as is often presumed, as a nonsensical utterance used merely to deflect the inquirer's intentions. Rather, the tree functions as a dynamic symbol for the substantiality and integrity of the inner self. The master's message is deceptively simple: pursuing an interior realm in the dynamic present must be the primary goal of a trainee, taking priority over the abstract matter of speculating about the first patriarch's inscrutable motives in the past or what may transpire in an unknowable future. Zen is thereby in accord with the approach of Sakyamuni the Buddha, whose teaching is known for the way he declined to answer a series of unedifying questions. The Buddha's parable of dislodging an arrow shot in one's heart insists that the cause of suffering must be removed immediately, instead of wasting time by dwelling on who drew the bow and why. As countless koan commentaries recommend, a Zen disciple must not act fool-

ishly like a dog chasing after a clod of dirt while the real prey slips away or a robbed man who realizes his loss just after the thief has already fled.

However, an interpretation emphasizing the inner journey, inspired by a master's eccentricity, is a necessary but not sufficient standpoint from which to capture the full set of meanings and implications indicated by the case, since the imagery is outward and seems exactly opposite to the interior state of mind. Koans are multifaceted, so other important aspects of historical and theoretical imagery embedded in this and related records need to be analyzed in order to gain a full picture of a case's overall significance. The koan tradition features a remarkable array of rhetorical devices that are closely associated with several additional aspects of Zen's comprehensive training program. These include styles of teaching and the contemplative states of mind fostered by various meditation practices. Also included are ways of administering monastic rules that establish or reinforce masters' authority and help them manage the selection of legitimate disciples so as to create a long-lasting lineage and legacy. Koan cases therefore deal with the role of Zen training that involves self-awareness and meditation, language and oratory, and monastic rules and implementing transmission to disciples.

In explaining the cypress tree dialogue, we should consider the personality and instructive style of the master, who was said to have lived for a Methuselah-like 120 years (778–897). He ran his own temple in a northerly province during the last forty years of his life, at a time when Zen was based in and identified primarily with southern China. Located near a small forest of aged trees common in the region, Zhaozhou's sanctuary was called Cypress Grove (Bailin) Temple. He may have selected the cypress tree in making his reply because it was an unassuming concrete phenomenon that stood in the background and caught his attention for a fleeting moment as he conversed with the disciple.

Still, Zhaozhou's answer is somewhat arbitrary because something else standing nearby could also have been chosen. In any event, the lesson the disciple learns is to heighten his awareness of the natural environment. Furthermore, it is crucial to see that the cypress tree was emblematic in Chinese lore of longevity and loyalty,

qualities long associated with legends concerning the travels of Bodhidharma. The first patriarch was said to have crossed the Yangzi River from southern to northern China while standing on a single reed of grass, and then he meditated facing the wall of a cave for nine years until his four limbs withered and fell off (lucky Daruma dolls are sold in Japan today with the fierce-looking Bodhidharma shown as a kind of Humpty-Dumpty). As indicated in *Gateless Gate* case 41, the first patriarch also required that Huike, who became the second patriarch, cut off his arm while standing waist-deep in a snowstorm as a sign of his determination and commitment to the path.

Probably because of his prized ingenuity in responding to the pedagogical needs of his followers, Zhaozhou has more koan records attributed to him than any other figure in Zen history. He is involved in seven cases in the *Gateless Gate* and several dozen more in additional collections, including a dozen dialogues in the *Blue Cliff Record*. It is also important to take into account the views of Zhaozhou's colleagues in regard to nature, as well as the rigor of reclusion and hermetic discipline maintained at their temples.

Zhaozhou's cypress tree in the courtyard.

Zhaozhou was known particularly for a life of effortless dedication to austerity, the enjoyment of drinking tea, and the companionship of common folk rather than the elite or powerful, whom he despised and willfully mistreated. Yet, in contrast to teachers of the era who would threaten to strike or slap disciples, Zhaozhou was not so dramatic; instead, through the impact of deceptively simple words, he unnerved his followers and undermined the ordinary ways of thinking that plagued them. His approach was called "lip Zen," since it was said that he exuded an aura around his mouth when he expressed particularly insightful instruction. Zhaozhou also had a knack for using commonplace items in the immediate surroundings—a radish, a water buffalo, a cloth shirt, or a stone bridge situated in the town near his temple—as matters for deep reflection in a koan dialogue. Everything and anything could be considered to express deep metaphysical truth.

Zhaozhou's responses were deliberately unpredictable or consistently inconsistent. Sometimes, he gave distinct answers to interlocutors who demonstrated the same behavior, as when in *Gateless Gate* case 11 he seeks out two hermits sitting in caves on the mountainside, both of whom raise a fist when they see him coming. In response, the master lavishly praises the accomplishment of one of the hermits while disdainfully dismissing the other. Only a Zen master can determine for sure who is being authentic and who is mimicking words or gestures. However, on other occasions, the master would give the same reply to different followers. For instance, he tells both a temple newcomer and an old-timer to "go have a drink of tea," and when asked why he did this he replies to the third party with the same instruction.

In accord with that model, there is a longer version of the koan record of the cypress tree that is included in Zhaozhou's recorded sayings, in which the disciple follows up on the initial reply by demanding that the master "not teach by referring to external surroundings." Zhaozhou denies that this is his way, but when the disciple demands another response the master says, "The cypress tree stands in the courtyard." Thus challenged, Zhaozhou simply—yet maddeningly—repeats the answer, although in other instances he gives contradictory or at least very different replies to the same query.

As an example of how follow-up commentaries can shed light (or, if called for, greater opacity), Dogen noted that if he were asked the question for a second time he would respond, "Next year again there will be new branches profusely blooming; the spring wind never rests." After a pause in his sermon he added, "Today, I have something else to say. Do you not want to hear it? In the cold of winter, I know the meaning of the green pine, and now I plant its spiritual root on the mountain peak." The naturalist imagery at once enhances and deflates the symbolism of the cypress tree.

In addition, even though Zhaozhou is better known for the first case in the *Gateless Gate,* in which he responds in the negative to the question of whether even a dog possesses the universal spirituality of Buddha-nature, there is also a dialogue in his recorded sayings in which a monk inquires, "Does even a cypress tree have Buddha-nature?" This leads to a deliberately circular exchange, in which the master replies, "Yes," and the monk asks, "Then, when will it become a Buddha?" Zhaozhou says, "When the sky falls to the earth," and the monk asks, "When will the sky fall to the earth?" The master responds, "When the cypress tree becomes a Buddha," and that is where the dialogue comes to an inconclusive end.

While Zhaozhou's style of teaching is a crucial factor for understanding the cypress tree dialogue, it is also important to take into account some of the historical conditions that gave rise to this type of perplexing exchange and how it contributes to an individual's quest to attain enlightenment through monastic training. Understanding what a koan means involves learning about the Zen institution and its system for training disciples and transmitting truth, or passing the torch from one generation to the next. Zhaozhou and other masters used dialogues in part to administer their temples by troubleshooting a member of the flock's transgressions or misdeeds while anointing carefully selected successors to the lineage.

In an era when Zen had become a dominant force in southern China, below the Yangzi River, the traditional dividing line between north and south, the temple run by Zhaozhou, who had been trained in the Southern school approach of using inexplicable words and deeds, was located off the beaten track, up in the north. This means that by the time a pilgrim reached the destination, he had probably

already exhausted other opportunities for acquiring a mentor or had heard that Zhaozhou's wisdom surpassed the capacity of rival teachers.

Nevertheless, Zhaozhou would not cater to fools and was highly selective in whom he taught. According to a dialogue attributed to him in *Gateless Gate* case 7, an overly eager neophyte asks the master early one morning for guidance on how to attain enlightenment and is told to go back to his room and wash his breakfast bowls. Here, the moral teaching in regard to the need to clear away abstractions and distractions by paying close attention to practical matters is probably even clearer than in the case of the cypress tree. Impatience while yearning to solve the bigger picture leaves menial but essential tasks untended in a way that prohibits realization of true reality. Enlightenment, so to speak, is in the details.

In conveying several levels of ideology while using few words, Zhaozhou's cryptic responses feature evocative minimalism and thought-provoking simplicity coupled with the master's eccentricity, tempered by flexible eclecticism. These personal traits and rhetorical elements contribute to the capacity of koan cases to expose illusion and cut through misapprehension in order to spark an awakening. The message expressed by both the breakfast bowl and the cypress tree cases is similarly many-sided in that truth is universal but applying its particular meaning depends on understanding the full context of how, why, when, where, and with whom the perplexing exchanges unfolded.

Some cases included in the *Gateless Gate* offer instruction by highlighting the role of religious implements, such as bells, robes, staffs, flags, and bowls. These accessories must be handled according to a strict set of monastic regulations. But these rules may seem quite arbitrary or irrelevant from the standpoint of spiritual awakening. In case 26, two monks roll up bamboo blinds before the midday meal, a ritual performed at the beginning of spring. In a Zhaozhou-like mixed response, the master says, "One's got it [or does it correctly], and the other does not [or fails in his effort]." On what basis has this judgment been determined?

In addition to dealing with monks and their utensils, some koans involve furry four-legged creatures prowling the temple compound.

These dialogues include the question about a dog's possession of spirituality, raised in *Gateless Gate* case 1, and the story, in case 14, of how a cat that two sets of monks quarrel over is cut in half by Nanquan, Zhaozhou's teacher. This is one of several cases in which there is an act of violence, as in case 3, when a novice's finger is severed, and in case 41, when Huike sacrifices his arm. After the main action in case 14, Nanquan tells the prize student Zhaozhou that his absurd action of putting a sandal on his head and walking away after hearing about what happened would have saved the animal's life. In the *Blue Cliff Record,* the cat dialogue is spread over two cases, indicating the variability of presentation and commentary in various koan collections.

While these koan records feature real creatures, since cats and dogs were kept on monastery grounds to chase pests or intruders and their presence also offered companionship in a lonely environment, in *Gateless Gate* case 2 a mysterious monk who appears as a shape-shifting fox asks master Baizhang to free him from bondage to moral causality. Many cases highlight specific concrete objects, but other dialogues involve dreams and visions, spirits and deities, and heavenly and otherworldly activities, as well as additional mythical ingredients. In these narratives, the natural and supernatural realms are often merged or played off each other in order to teach a lesson about moral activity related to spiritual fulfillment.

Furthermore, in several dialogues Zhaozhou leaves the temple compound to interact with irregular practitioners or other challenges to his abbacy's authority. In addition to the koan involving two hermits, *Gateless Gate* case 31 features Zhaozhou's encounter with a wise old woman who sells rice cakes by the side of the road that leads to the Buddhist cultic center on Mount Wutai, near his temple. This sacred mountain range was the source of magnificent visionary experiences of the bodhisattva Maitreya riding on a white elephant among multicolored clouds and for that reason was considered off limits for Zen monks engaged strictly with inner contemplation. Zhaozhou wanted to stop the granny from encouraging his disciples to travel there. He claims to have "checked out," or investigated, the old lady, but the ending is vague about which of the elderly parties, the male priest or female layperson, was the winner of the contest of wills.

Another crucial element of exploring koan cases concerns the role of commentaries, which amplify, enhance, or sometimes defer from the content of the dialogue. In a couple of instances, Wumen's remarks push the discourse into a different area altogether. In case 24, a master responds to a disciple's query about speech and silence by citing a verse by an ancient Chinese poet:

> I always remember the spring in my home province,
> Where the partridges sing;
> And the boundless flowers are so fragrant!

Wumen's comment, which suggests that the master has actually failed by evoking this verse, cautions the reader to always put things in "your own words." On the other hand, Wumen uses a poem with seasonal imagery in remarking on case 19, in which Nanquan says, "The Way is not a matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is confusion. When you have really reached the true Way beyond doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as outer space." According to Wumen's naturalist verse:

> Spring flowers, autumn moon;
> Summer breezes, winter snow.
> If useless things do not clutter your mind,
> Then every day is a good time of year.

To cite another famous example of an indirect response that sheds light on the role of koans, it is interesting to note that the first evidence of Zen on the shores of Japan occurred when a monk in the late 1100s was brought to the imperial court. Asked about the teachings of his school, this master played a few notes on his flute without adding any words. In that sense, a case consists of any type of saying or doing that defies convention and defeats expectation so as to call into question all assumptions about self and reality.

CHAPTER 2

Developmental Stages and Rhetorical Strategies

A Historical Overview

Koans to Live By

The primary aim of this book is to show, through an objective analysis integrating historical and textual studies, that there is a rather clear-cut and consistent set of discernible meanings underlying the aura of mystery surrounding koan literature. This study builds on some of the methodological tools offered by current scholarly resources on East Asian thought and culture, which include a vast storehouse of classic writings available in print and digital versions, as well as new methodologies for interpreting traditional materials. A great number of recent scholarly translations and interpretations published on both sides of the Pacific have done an admirable job of examining koan sources through extensive research into the background and contemporary implications of case collection commentaries. These interpretative works provide important theoretical perspectives that are further advanced and expanded in Chapter 3.

The first step in understanding the current impact of any traditional or premodern cultural production is to explain its historical development. This includes the overarching trajectory of progression over the course of centuries as well as the important twists and turns that took place along the way. Therefore, before formulating a theory of koan literature and practice, this chapter provides a critical overview of the main chronological stages and philosophical discussions that characterize the unfolding of the koan tradition. The chapter also shows how diverse cultural influences, including imagery borrowed from legalism, the fine arts, folklore, and military strategies,

all managed to infiltrate and help shape the construction of koan writings. In addition, the analysis considers the role of schismatic debates. These debates, forceful at times, involved rhetorical strategies in relation to meditative training with koan cases.

Historical Stages

The summary of the development of koans presented in Table 2.1 outlines fifteen hundred years of history. This begins with dialogues attributed to early patriarchs before or during the Tang dynasty and extends through Song dynasty collections to late medieval and modern

TABLE 2.1 FOUR MAIN STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KOANS

Stage I. Formative Period
First Cases Originate in Pre- and Tang China (sixth–ninth centuries)
1. Pre-Tang Dialogues Challenging Authority
2. Early Tang Northern School's Gradual Approach
3. Later Tang Southern School's Shocking Teaching Style
Stage II. Summative Period
Song China Collections Transmitted to Japan and Korea (tenth–sixteenth centuries)
1. Northern Song Transmission Records
2. Southern Song Koan Collections
3. Japanese and Korean Extensions of Commentarial Tradition
Stage III. Reform Period
Reform in Late Imperial China and Early Modern Japan (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries)
1. Qing Syncretism with Nianfo/Nembutsu Practice
2. Obaku School Arrives in Japan
3. Edo Japanese Reforms in Rinzai and Soto Schools
Stage IV. Global Period
Ongoing Spread from Modern East Asia to the West (twentieth–twenty-first centuries)
1. Koans in Asia and America
2. Western Successors
3. Recent Cultural Trends

innovations in Japan and Korea as well as the worldwide dissemination of case records to the West.

Each of the four main stages, lasting several centuries each, is further broken down into three important substages of growth, for a total of nine phases over the course of a millennium and a half of expansion. This historical reconstruction represents one way of explaining the history of koans that is in accord with standard accounts, according to both classic writings and current scholarship. However, because the sequence of koan development is quite complicated, the template could be modified or revised for other purposes depending on which of the multifarious factors of the tradition are highlighted.

STAGE I: FORMATIVE PERIOD

First Cases Originate in Pre- and Tang China (sixth–ninth centuries)

Period Overview: The initial stage in the formation of koan cases originated with a series of dialogues attributed to first patriarch Bodhidharma, who introduced Zen as a separate school during the sixth century. This development was followed by the inventive pedagogical style of the Northern school, which gained followers for about a hundred years in the capital city of Chang'an (modern Xi'an), a main destination for Silk Road travelers of the era. The Northern school thrived at first but was rather quickly supplanted by the teachings of the Southern school when for sociopolitical reasons Zen monks moved to areas below the Yangzi River. The enshrinement in the eighth century of sixth patriarch Huineng was based on his approach to sudden enlightenment. Then master Mazu and his highly influential Hongzhou lineage advocated a more radical view of training through volatile exchanges between masters and disciples. This period has three substages:

I.1. Pre-Tang Dialogues Challenging Authority (sixth century)

The earliest example of a Zen dialogue is attributed, in *Gateless Gate* case 6, to Sakyamuni, whose silent teaching, based on holding up a flower instead of giving a sermon, was passed to one of his main disciples, Mahakasyapa. The fact that Mahakasyapa smiled knowingly to show his understanding of this special transmission is con-

sidered to represent the primordial moment in the formation of the movement. Following this example, perhaps the first recorded exchange in China that evolved into a koan case involved Bodhidharma, the son of a Brahmin king considered in traditional lineage charts to be the twenty-eighth patriarch in India following Sakyamuni. There are also legends that Sakyamuni was the seventh in a line of primordial (or prehistorical) Buddhas, which would make Bodhidharma the thirty-fourth patriarch.

After migrating in the mid-500s to China, where he became known as the founding patriarch of Zen, Bodhidharma was invited to a meeting with Emperor Wu, an encounter that appears as the opening case of the *Blue Cliff Record*. The emperor asked the itinerant yet prestigious foreign monk how much karmic merit he was earning for doing various good deeds for society, such as ordaining Buddhist monks, building monasteries, having sutras copied, or commissioning Buddha images. Bodhidharma replied outrageously, "No merit," and also suggested, "There is no noble truth; there is only universal emptiness." Emperor Wu asked, "Then who is standing before me?" The first patriarch held his ground, saying, "I do not know [alternative translation: "No one"], Your Majesty." This flippant answer was intended not so much as a slap in the face to authority as an attempt to redeem the most exalted figure in the land from his misconceptions. This was done by conveying an understanding that the metaphysical void underlies—and undermines—all his worthy but in the final analysis mundane worldly efforts, which do not reach the heights of spiritual insight.

Additionally, Bodhidharma was involved in several dialogues dealing with the process of transmission. In *Gateless Gate* case 41, Bodhidharma also used a play on words to pacify the mind of his successor, who was still troubled by anxious thoughts after the dismemberment. In another noteworthy exchange, which took place some years later, Bodhidharma selected his heir by interviewing four disciples, and Huike was awarded the marrow, or innermost level, of the first patriarch's spirit for remaining silent. The other three disciples each earned the first patriarch's skin, flesh, and bones, respectively, based on the relative quality of their verbal responses.

To prevent followers from forming an attachment to Bodhidharma or other exalted leaders, koan rhetoric uses insults as a form of disingenuous blasphemy about the role masters play. The verse comment to case 6, for instance, says that Buddha "revealed his curly tail," indicating that he was a mischievous wild fox spirit in disguise. Similarly, the prose comment to case 41 refers to the first patriarch as a "broken-toothed old barbarian" for his age and disheveled appearance. That passage continues with high praise, noting that Bodhidharma "came with a sense of urgency for thousands of miles over the sea. His travels raised waves even where there was no wind. In his last years he induced enlightenment in his disciple. . . . But Xuansha did not know the four ideographs." The last line is an intriguing reference to a prominent Zen master who started out as an illiterate fisherman and never learned the alphabet. Despite the deficiency of not recognizing the Chinese characters, Xuansha was able to outsmart other priests. He was also known for delivering a bit of tongue-in-cheek sarcasm, saying that "Bodhidharma never came to China."

I.2. Early Tang Northern School's Gradual Approach (seventh century)

Following Bodhidharma, who established Shaolin Temple in northern China, near Chang'an, several approaches to dialogues that evolved into koan rhetoric were formulated. At this stage, the Zen movement was still in an early developmental phase, with several important representatives in the capital but no clear link to the central imperial government after the death of Emperor Wu. By the time of fifth patriarch Hongren, in the mid-seventh century, the teaching of the Northern school prevailed. Although its focus on gradual enlightenment attained by removing defilements was eventually eclipsed by the Southern school's drastic pedagogical methods, the sayings of Northern school masters featured antecedents to koan literature through curious and inscrutable responses—answering a question with a question or in some indirect, metaphorical, or otherwise perplexing way. The records show that Northern school masters sometimes used various nonlinguistic means, such as gestures or body language, to convey a spiritual message.

According to accounts of his early training, Hongren met the fourth patriarch, Daoxin, on a road in Huangmei, where an important early Zen temple was established. In a fascinating dialogue featuring a clever philosophical quip, their exchange centered on a play on words involving the term for "name," which is a homophone for "nature." Daoxin asked for the name of Hongren, a typical opening query used in many dialogues. Hongren replied, "I have nature, but it is not a common name." The master said, "What name is it?" and Hongren answered, "It is the nature of being Buddha." Daoxin replied, "So you have no name?" and Hongren said, "None, because Buddha-nature is empty." As in Bodhidharma's exchange with the monarch, through this dialogue with the fourth patriarch, Hongren stressed that the meaning of emptiness supersedes yet gives meaning to everyday concerns. Daoxin then passed on the lineage to Hongren, including the robe, which was symbolic of transmission.

Another literary element that developed during this phase's contribution to the koan tradition was the inclusion in Northern school writings of conversion stories. In these narratives, which are reminiscent of early Buddhist Jataka morality tales about the previous lifetimes of the Buddha, Zen teachers preached the dharma to magical animals or nature spirits. Though these beings might commit an act of violence or harm by causing illness or disrupting a community with a catastrophic flood or fire, they were conscious of their karma and secretly longed in their souls to follow a religious lifestyle gained by discovering that they, too, participated in the realm of universal Buddha-nature. Based on these accounts, Zen masters would come forward and save people who had been victimized by taming the vengeful spirits with their wisdom, which they expressed through clever dialogues. By defeating and overcoming misdeeds via the power of words rather than magic, or in some instances using words to supplement magic, teachers of the Northern school enabled otherworldly beings to be released from the bad karma that caused them to be demonic. They could then attain true enlightenment or be reborn as penitent and compassionate human beings on the spiritual pathway to nirvana.

I.3. Later Tang Southern School's Shocking Teaching Style (eighth–ninth centuries)

The rise of koan dialogues took place mainly as part of the cultural peak of Buddhism, achieved during the golden age of Tang dynasty Chinese society. At that time, Buddhist poetry and fine arts reflecting various influences were helping to make China one of the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan societies in the world. In Zen, Mazu followed sixth patriarch Huineng as an important leader of the Southern school two generations later. The Southern school's approach emphasized for the first time the use of strange words and extraordinary deeds as a deliberate rhetorical strategy; it soon became the hallmark of Zen training methods.

Huineng started his career as an illiterate southerner who was inspired by Zen teachings and traveled north to receive instruction. However, the temple abbot told him that his upbringing disqualified him from having Buddha-nature. Huineng replied, "Although people exist as northerners and southerners, in the Buddha-nature there is neither north nor south. A barbarian differs from your holiness physically, but what difference is there in our Buddha-nature?" This clever and thoughtful retort bested the high priest, and Huineng was accepted into the community of monks.

Some years later, the illiterate upstart won a poetry competition held by Hongren to determine succession. According to the verse composed by his main rival for the post, a monk named Shenxiu who represented the Northern school and was the heir apparent:

> The body is a Bodhi tree,
> And the mind a standing mirror bright.
> At all times polish it diligently,
> And let no dust alight.

This poem implies a duality between wisdom (Bodhi, the illumination of Buddha) and ignorance (dust collected on the surface), as well as between sudden illumination (bright mirror) and gradual practice (the act of polishing). After hearing this poem, Huineng asked a temple officer to write down his new verse. This remarkable four-line poem inverted the emphasis in the previous imagery in order to express

nonduality by highlighting the emptiness of all conceptual categories, including the apparent dichotomy of wisdom and ignorance:

> Bodhi is fundamentally without any tree;
> The bright mirror also has no stand.
> Fundamentally there is not a single thing—
> Where could any dust be collected?

Huineng was quickly anointed in the transmission process, although not without having to deal with the furious protests of some of the mainstream monks, who in the end came to admire and respect the wisdom of the sixth patriarch. One of the most prominent Zen texts, *The Platform Sutra,* tells the story of his life and teaching. According to Huineng's approach, conventional Zen practice, including repentance rituals for committing transgression and meditation for soothing the mind, is rendered irrelevant by the flash of instantaneous insight that is triggered by a koan dialogue. In other words, the suddenness of enlightenment attained via koan practice is full and complete. This model of spontaneity prevails over the use of gradual means to purify the mind and attain an altered state of consciousness over the course of time.

Shenhui, the main supporter of Huineng, was later asked why his teacher refused to instruct followers on the need to practice sitting meditation, or zazen. Since this technique for contemplation is made superfluous by virtue of the attainment of sudden insight, Shenhui replied, "If I taught people to do these things, it would be a hindrance to attaining enlightenment." He then explained, "The 'sitting' [*za*] I refer to means not to give rise to deluded thoughts. The 'meditation' [*zen*] I refer to is seeing into one's own original nature." True seeing is more basic than actual training.

Zen lore includes princely figures such as Shakyamuni Buddha and Bodhidharma, who have selflessly chosen to come to the aid of humanity. Because of their high social status, they are easy targets in koan commentaries for tongue-in-cheek sarcastic invectives in addition to considerable praise. Huineng, on the other hand, rose from the lowliest rank and is given kinder treatment, for example, in the prose remark on case 29 that refers to his boundless compassion.

However, the commentator also calls the sixth patriarch to task for being overly indulgent in his manner of training disciples. In typical koan commentarial fashion, case interpreters can find fault with anyone, no matter—or, especially, because of—how much they are venerated.

A couple of generations following Huineng, Mazu became head of the newly formed Hongzhou lineage, which was located in Jiangxi Province south of the Yangzi River and was the dominant stream within the Southern school. According to one of his prominent dialogues, a monk asked why Mazu maintained the notion "Mind itself is the Buddha." This represented a shocking nondualistic assertion, which might be understood as suggesting that tainted everyday thoughts are equal to the state of enlightenment. The master answered, "Because I want to stop the crying of a baby." This indicates that a provisional teaching used as a skillful means for a particular disciple could be revised for a different situation and therefore should not be taken as the final or definitive word. When the monk persisted, "If the crying stops, what is the truth then?" Mazu retorted, "Not mind, not Buddha," seemingly the opposite notion from what he first espoused. Sometime later, Mazu's disciple Damei, who had opened his own monastery, showed that he appreciated this paradox of affirmation-negation. Learning of this from a distance through a courier, Mazu said, "The plum [*mei*] is ripe [*da*]," using creative wordplay on the literal meaning of the follower's name.

The Hongzhou stream included several of the greatest figures in Zen history in successive generations: Baizhang established the main guidebook containing Zen monastic rules based on following the teachings of a living master; Huangbo wrote philosophical treatises with the aid of a leading scholar-official and was also involved in various dialogues; and Linji (J. Rinzai), known for his brash, take-no-prisoners style of teaching, founded one of the two main branches of Zen. Also, Zhaozhou was in a collateral lineage to Mazu's. At the time, he apparently saw himself as a rival to Linji, whose temple was located nearby in northern China in close proximity to the pilgrimage site at Mount Wutai. An interesting dialogue took place when Zhaozhou visited the temple of Linji, who was in the midst of performing chores. Not surprisingly, in Zhaozhou's recorded sayings he

emerges from a brief exchange as the enlightened victor who bested the adversary in a psychic battle. In the Linji record's version, the roles in this intriguing contest of wills are unsurprisingly reversed.

Although it became better known than some of the other factions, Mazu's Hongzhou lineage was by no means alone or unique: representatives of all streams of the multibranched and expanding Zen movement were also using dialogues as the primary teaching technique during the Tang dynasty. Curious exchanges were accompanied or supplemented by demonstrative gestures, such as shouting, tweaking noses or ears, slapping, or even hitting with a staff in order to awaken incorrigibly stubborn disciples from their philosophical slumber. One of the prominent figures in a lineage derived from master Shitou, which eventually evolved into the Soto school, was master Deshan. He relished dishing out thirty blows of his stick whenever he became impatient with a follower's ignorance. Once known as the king of the *Diamond Sutra* for his extensive commentaries, Deshan burned all the scrolls once he gained enlightenment.

STAGE II: SUMMATIVE PERIOD

Song China Collections Transmitted to Japan and Korea (tenth–sixteenth centuries)

Period Overview: The second main stage in the history of koans represents the classic period, during which the exploits of Tang masters were recorded and enhanced through extensive commentaries contained in the major case collections. Based on this textual development, the study of koan records became the foundation for various kinds of meditative practices that quickly spread among both monks and the literati throughout China. These techniques were also transmitted and became very popular in Japan among samurai, in addition to spreading to Korea and elsewhere, especially Vietnam. The three substages are as follows.

II.1. Northern Song Transmission Records (tenth–eleventh centuries)

By the end of the tenth century, an extended period of challenges to Zen that began in the latter days of the Tang dynasty had faded. These problems included the systematic suppression of Buddhist

schools caused by restrictive government policies affecting all foreign religious movements. Then Zen emerged as the mainstream form of Buddhism and began to enjoy the backing of imperial powers. It was no longer regarded as a renegade community. Instead, the legends of its irreverent masters were considered inspirational by lay leaders of society. They saw the unique form of spirituality in koan literature incorporating the use of high-minded rhetorical devices as a major imaginative force for promoting unity and creativity throughout the realm. Advances in the technology of woodblock publishing enabled the mass distribution of Zen writings for an ever-widening and increasingly enthusiastic audience.

The dialogues of Tang masters were first contained in a series of writings commissioned by imperial rulers known as "records of the transmission of the lamp" (symbolizing the torch being passed from the main master of one generation to his successor in the next). The voluminous transmission texts tracked the development of various Zen lineages, extending from the time of Sakyamuni through Bodhidharma, Hongren, Huineng, Mazu, Linji, Shitou, Deshan, and many other luminaries representing different streams leading up to the then-current period. Modern scholars refer to the composition style of these writings as pseudo-historical. The entries for each master appear to follow the method of official biographies, which documented the basic facts of a prominent figure's life, including birth and education, roles and titles, and death and burial ceremonies.

Writings about Zen masters included many of these historical elements, but as religious rather than secular texts, they strayed from fact by embellishing and exaggerating source materials. In doing this, they violated some of the basic rules of historiography for the sake of promoting hagiography, or creating a mythical account of sacred leaders who demonstrated special skills. These ranged from verbal prowess suggested through creative literary allusions, with philosophical puns based on transcendental insight, to examples influenced by folklore of miraculous evangelical deeds derived from the ability to manipulate supranatural powers to redeem the karma of the ignorant or foolish.

II.2. Southern Song Koan Collections (twelfth century)

At the dawn of the Southern Song dynasty in 1127, leading Zen priests were compiling koan collections at a rapidly accelerating pace. Their writings tried to highlight the spiritual significance of dialogues in a way that hinted at but did not give away too much of the meaning to the reader. The goal was to use indirect references and allusive remarks that forced one to read between the lines. Trainees were told over and over again that it was necessary for each and every one of them to come to their own conclusions about the import of case records. True insight could never be the result of memorizing the dialogues or delivering expected or cookie-cutter interpretations.

As a form of mystical instruction that replaced scriptures and doctrinal formulations by emphasizing the role of immediate and unimpeded awakening, cases were important not only for training Zen monks but also for a more general appeal to the emerging meritocratic class of elite scholar-officials. Over the course of several centuries, koan texts were composed by priests, with introductions or related supplementary materials contributed by prominent literati associates. As leaders of the ruling bureaucracy, many well-educated scholar-officials gained a sophisticated, cosmopolitan worldview, leading them to seek an intensely personal experience of self-discovery and self-realization. They became religious seekers, aspiring to a life-altering experience or longing to be comforted in their daily lives by the wisdom of Zen masters.

Literati frequently attended Buddhist ceremonies or took part in retreats to study cases. These events were held at temples in both countryside and urban areas, where Zen spread based on complex patterns of official patronage promoting this thriving monastic institution. Furthermore, Zen masters often wrote epistles or composed verses as memorials for the deceased, or to encourage support for a family member facing a personal crisis, such as illness, death, or triumph, including passing entrance examinations. These means of communication often used koan cases as ways of teaching lessons about how to deal with loss or celebrate victory by exercising moderation based on an awareness of the ephemerality of all phenomena.

The Linji school monk Dahui, who played a crucial role in the advancement of koan practice in the twelfth century, was one of the most prominent figures promoting outreach to lay followers. He frequently evaluated the religious experiences these disciples reported to determine the authenticity of the claim for awakening. In various ways, koan writings came to be interwoven in the intellectual and social lives of literati occupying cultural centers throughout China. However, Dahui and other leading priests as well as scholar-officials were ever wary of imperial authorities, who sought to suppress any cultural expressions that might be considered subversive or detrimental to government control. Although he was abbot of some of the most prestigious temples near the capital in Hangzhou, Dahui also spent more than two decades in exile, including a spell of fifteen years in the malarial far southern districts.

One of the main literary motifs developed during this phase was the pervasive use of capping-phrase remarks. These are line-by-line comments provided for dialogues as well as verses previously composed for a case. Capping phrases usually make an ironic observation in order to keep readers on their toes by encouraging them not to feel too familiar or comfortable with the literature. Just when it seems that one party in the narrative is outdoing the exchange partner, the commentator says just the reverse in his marginal notes. In many instances, capping phrases serve as put-downs for stubborn or arrogant monks. Examples include "He talks like a wild fox spirit" (indicating duplicity), "He carries a board over his shoulder" (narrow-mindedness), and "He doesn't even know his shit stinks" (foolhardiness). According to commentators, nobody, including Buddha and Bodhidharma, is above the fray or exempt from criticism.

In addition, the twelfth century was marked by a great schism between the Linji/Rinzai and Caodong/Soto schools, which disputed the role of literature in relation to the practice of meditation. At that time, the Linji branch, led by Dahui and his lineage, gained by far the greatest popularity in making koans accessible to the literati. Dahui developed a new contemplative technique known as "concentrating on the keyword, or critical phrase" (C. *huatou,* J. *watō,* K. *hwadu*). This required learning only a highly abbreviated form of a case, for example, "cypress tree," "wash your bowl," or "drink tea," rather than the

full dialogue or commentaries. The records of koans became a way for monks in training to focus their contemplation on particular phrases that propelled them to an experience of enlightenment in which ordinary language and logic were left behind. Based on grappling with this function of dialogues, a system was created for masters to instruct and examine disciples' progress, although there were often conflicting understandings of how this testing process should be undertaken. The main view in today's research is that monks were required to learn the full body of literature but used the keyword technique to sharpen their meditative focus. Laypersons, on the other hand, were not required to conduct advanced studies and found this approach easy to incorporate into the activities of their busy daily lives. The Caodong school was concerned primarily with monastic training and continued its emphasis on literary pursuits. For the most part, koans were no longer being created in China, as that phase of growth had pretty much ended, but masters in the Song dynasty produced a few examples of new cases. Linji school teacher Wuzu, of the late eleventh century, whose disciple Yuanwu was the editor of the *Blue Cliff Record,* created cases 35, 36, and 38 of the *Gateless Gate.*

II.3. Japanese and Korean Extensions of Commentarial Tradition (thirteenth–sixteenth centuries)

The tradition of koan literature and practice was spread to Japan and Korea at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In Japan, where Zen quickly gained traction with the newly installed shogun and his retinue of warriors, representatives of both the Rinzai and Soto schools advocated abbreviation and literary embellishment. In Korea, however, it was only the keyword technique that gained hold in the Jogye Order, founded by Jinul, and this method of training has remained the conventional approach for centuries.

The success of Zen in Japan followed the high literary culture of the Heian era (794–1185), an era dominated by the Tendai school of Buddhism, which emphasized universal enlightenment. After many years in which travel between countries was prohibited or very restricted for political reasons, Japanese monks journeyed more freely to China at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and shortly after

this, Chinese monks were recruited to serve at temples in Japan. The port of entry for the Japanese pilgrims was Hangzhou, which housed the most prestigious Zen temples in China. It was also perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in the world at the time, according to the accounts of Marco Polo, who disembarked there for his return to Venice after spending a quarter century traveling throughout the Middle East and China. Although somewhat naïve and misinformed, Polo's records are useful for understanding the role on Chinese soil of Buddhism along with other foreign religions, including Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, during the empire of Kublai Khan, whose mother was Christian (although he was personally sympathetic to Zen as well as Tantric Buddhism imported from Tibet).

Chinese masters who were invited to visit reciprocated this cultural exchange with Japan and often became masters of large Japanese monasteries. Two main factors account for the popularity of koans during this period of Japanese history. First, this collection of writings was a vehicle for introducing new styles of poetry into the already rich Japanese literature, which produced the *Tale of Genji* in the early 1000s. As with the use of Latin by clerics in medieval Europe, Japanese monks wrote poetry following the manner of regulated Chinese verse as a sign of their virtuosity. This body of work forms an important part of the association of the most elite Rinzai Zen temples, known as "Five Mountains Literature." The other factor was the interest in the study of koans by leading samurai, who constituted the new exclusive caste in a civil war–torn society. Warriors were fascinated and eager to learn this freshly imported set of writings. Training with cases under the tutelage of a mentor was considered an effective mental tool for cultivating the sense of alert anticipation needed to attain victory on the battlefield. As in China, the sacred temple along with the secular societal realms of leadership were linked in Japan in large part by the powerful impact of koan records.

Throughout medieval Japan, koan study was strongly supported by the leaders of Rinzai and Soto Zen. In the Rinzai school, the early-fourteenth-century monk Daito was known for his eloquent capping-phrase commentaries on the *Blue Cliff Record*. Many other monks took part in poetry contests that were based on or that alluded to

koan cases as part of the Five Mountains culture. In the Soto school, founder Dogen composed innovative Sino-Japanese remarks on hundreds of cases that are considered a hallmark in the history of Japanese literature from the period. The Soto school's eminent fourth patriarch, Keizan, also cited koan records extensively in his volume tracing the history of the school's great masters, *Records of Transmission of the Light,* as did many followers in his expanded lineage.

In Kamakura-era Japan, an emphasis was placed on constructing insightful and illuminative commentary by following the behavioral models for abbots used in Chinese temples. Rinzai and Soto masters would comment on koans while giving formal sermons to their disciples assembled in the Dharma Hall or by inviting young or advanced followers into their private quarters for special training sessions. In addition, they often addressed an audience that included prominent lay devotees through informal sermons about cases. Sometimes they gave instructions to their flock by passing out pieces of paper with drawings of symbols, such as circles to indicate the phases of the moon. Regardless of the style of commentary, the overwhelmingly favorite collection for all factions was the *Gateless Gate.*

In Korea, the use of koans based on Chinese methods of teaching particularly associated with the Dahui-originated keyword technique was developed in the early thirteenth century through the teachings of the Jogye Order's Jinul and his successor, Hyesim. The massive koan collection completed by Hyesim and further amplified by his disciple Gag'un borrowed heavily from Chinese sources yet created innovative styles of commentary that serve as a rich storehouse of textual materials for understanding the role of Zen theory and practice as it developed in East Asia.

In the fourteenth century, Taego helped revive koan studies in Korea during a time of turmoil caused by Mongol invasions and other political conflicts and reversals. Taego, a brilliant writer who composed poetry and prose comments on many cases, was greatly influenced by Song Chinese styles of writing and was especially known for his letters of instruction to lay followers, which also perpetuated the way Zen had been practiced in the Chinese social context. Taego himself was enlightened after working for five years on the koan "No" as uttered by Zhaozhou in response to the question of

whether a dog has Buddha-nature, the first case in the *Gateless Gate*. The compiler of that collection, Wumen, and many other monks in all three countries, including the famous Japanese eighteenth-century reformer Hakuin, similarly spent many months or years plumbing the depths of nothingness and negation embedded in the one-word reply prior to gaining awakening. Following the lead of Jinul, who was in turn greatly influenced by Dahui, who favored the "No" koan as the quintessential example of keyword meditation, Taego used this case as the main source of instruction when teaching monks as well as lay disciples.

Throughout the medieval period in China, Japan, and Korea, there were several important patterns involving koan literature. First, Zen and other Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist schools were subject to strict government supervision regulating all religious activities that might be considered troublesome or potentially subversive to the authority of imperial rule or military law. Furthermore, pragmatic Confucians were frequently involved in criticizing the seemingly nihilistic thought and antinomian behavior of monks who were located in mountain monasteries and outside of social controls. Despite concerns about the issues of oversight and sectarian attacks, the ingenious creativity and thought-provoking value of koans were able to capture both intellectuals' and warriors' imaginations. These social leaders often took part in Zen meditative practice alongside monks, for either shorter retreats or more prolonged periods of training at a temple.

In China, poets such as the innovative eleventh-century literary maestro Su Shi, who was also a government official for a time as mayor of Hangzhou, participated extensively in koan training. This was also true nearly half a millennium later for pioneering seventeenth-century Japanese swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, the creator of the *Book of Five Rings,* which remains a bestseller today for both MBA and military training programs. Studying cryptic yet seemingly maddening cases was the primary technique used for nurturing the mental capacity and leadership skills of society's rulers. In turn, monks in both countries collaborated with learned lay figures in composing poetry, drawing calligraphy, designing gardens, writing or producing plays, and serving tea. All these disciplines were carried out ac-

cording to precise sets of rules and regulations that governed the art forms, but enabled flashes of spontaneous creativity to emerge.

Another pattern in the use of koans in East Asia was the compilation of handbooks that summarized koan records and were used as tools for study and memorization by trainees who knew they needed to perform well when tested on cases by their often unforgiving masters. However, these manuals were often criticized for becoming cheat sheets that did not allow ingenuity or individuality to emerge. As Taego said in a case about the "No" koan,

> The entire world is a single gate,
> So please enter at will.
> When you have thoroughly penetrated the meaning of
> Zhaozhou's "No,"
> All the chains will finally be released at once and forever.

Inner understanding cannot be bought or sold.

STAGE III: REFORM PERIOD

Reform in Late Imperial China and Early Modern Japan (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries)

Period Overview: By the seventeenth century, the heyday of Zen Buddhism's impact on East Asian society, which was based in large part on the expansive role of koan literary practice, had somewhat faded, but it had by no means disappeared. A period of revival then ensued through interaction with the Pure Land school practice of the nianfo/nembutsu chant. In Japan, the combined technique of koan and nembutsu was introduced by the new Obaku school, which had migrated from China. However, Rinzai master Hakuin fiercely criticized this method while supporting the keyword approach of Dahui from the Song dynasty. Meanwhile, the Soto school, in rivalry with Rinzai, was forced to distance itself from the use of koans. Here are the three substages of this period:

III.1. Qing Syncretism with Nianfo/Nembutsu Practice (seventeenth century)

Despite the quixotic and contradictory as well as intensely personal and reclusive nature of Zen discourse, for several centuries

each in China, Japan, and Korea, koan cases functioned as the main practical tool of a thriving religious movement. Koans were dramatically successful within the context of a highly competitive socioreligious environment and allowed Zen to prevail in rivalries with other forms of Buddhist training as well as spiritual techniques promoted by the Confucian, Daoist, Shinto, and additional indigenous traditions.

By the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) in China, as well as the days around the dawn of the Edo period (1600–1868) in Japan, the Zen path of self-power, or reliance on inspiration and insight stemming from within, had lost much of its footing in society. Koan training was increasingly challenged by the practice of the recitation of the name of the Buddha or by the nianfo/nembutsu training cultivated by the Pure Land school that was based on the path of other-power and the need to acquiesce to the salvific capacity of Amida Buddha. Although there were vast differences in the philosophies underlying these spiritual techniques, koans and nianfo/nembutsu similarly constituted ways of summoning an unusually succinct type of oral expression in order to regulate mental processes on the path to enlightenment.

Interaction between koans and nianfo/nembutsu was initiated as early as the Southern Song dynasty, but at that time Pure Land recitation was largely repudiated by Dahui's mainstream lineage. In Japan, Dogen compared the recitation to the croaking of a frog. Many Zen thinkers continued to see nembutsu as simplistic and wanted to exclude the ritual entirely from meditation. Other thinkers advocated for developing syncretism with this technique; they started to view the recitation as a kind of koan by contemplating the meaning while chanting the syllables used in the prayer. At the beginning of the 1600s, a leading Zen monk named Zhuhong advocated this syncretic approach. A famous integrated koan-nianfo practice that is still popular in China was developed based on the inquiry, "Who Is the Reciter of the Buddha's Name?" This case transforms the practice of recitation into an introspective process of self-discovery by highlighting the emptiness of all conceptual categories, including selfhood.

III.2. Obaku School Arrives in Japan (seventeenth century)

Obaku was a new, third school of Zen that migrated to Japan from the shores of southeastern China in the seventeenth century. It was one of the few cultural or commercial imports allowed during the period of seclusion enforced by the powerful shogunate that expelled all foreign influences, both Asian and European, after disastrous interactions with Christian missionaries in the 1500s. Exerting an impact that extended well beyond its small number of followers because of the prestige of its Chinese background, the Obaku sect was a proponent of integrating koans with nembutsu. This combined practice at first caught on quickly. While placing less emphasis on literary training, Obaku introduced other features of Zen practice that were common in China, especially a more colorful and elaborate style for ceremonies and festivities, which were otherwise being carried out in rather austere fashion by Japanese monks.

III.3. Edo Japanese Reforms in Rinzai and Soto Schools (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries)

During the Edo period, the shogun, who preferred Confucian philosophy based on loyalty to authority, demanded that all Buddhist schools define their main form of practice so that there would be no overlap or redundancy between rival factions. In that context, Rinzai Zen became associated with koan practice, whereas Soto Zen was linked to zazen practice. This was a false distinction from the standpoint of the historical record, but it is misleadingly perpetuated today in some circles and, unfortunately, lies at the root of many sectarian stereotypes and biases.

In the eighteenth century, Hakuin became the most prominent Japanese Rinzai master of all time. He purified koan practice of any trace of alternative ritual elements, especially the nembutsu. The life story of Hakuin, who is known for inventing the case of the sound of one hand clapping, is particularly compelling for the ways in which he at first struggled with solving cases for a prolonged period in his own practice and then, once enlightened, taught mainly by evoking koan records. Hakuin went through the entire cycle of Zen illness, with its manifold physical and mental side effects, and he also benefited from its cure that was gained through sudden enlightenment by

contemplating for a prolonged period the "No" koan of Zhaozhou's dog. Hakuin later categorized and ranked in difficulty a system of about 250 dialogues. This organization of case records remains in use with various modifications in major Rinzai training temples, such as the Daitokuji and Myoshinji temples in Kyoto. The practice includes a series of checking questions, which ensure that the trainee's level of insight is secure. Any particular case can have a few dozen or more checking questions. Despite being identified with the koan-investigation approach, which dispenses with elaborate rhetoric, Hakuin was also known for his elaborate commentaries on the *Blue Cliff Record,* his favorite classic Zen text, which he studied and lectured on for three decades.

During the Edo period, the Soto school needed to declare its autonomy from Rinzai Zen before the shogunate. Beginning with Dogen and for centuries thereafter, the sect's leaders had been offering wide-ranging interpretations of koan cases, but they were now placed in the awkward position of disavowing the use of koans. Instead, Soto scholastic studies during this phase concentrated exclusively on analyzing the writings of the founder, particularly the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* but without emphasizing the extensive role of koan commentary found in his works. Since the Rinzai school stressed monastic purity through preserving the multifaceted legacy of literary records, somewhat ironically given the context of Song dynasty koan history, the Soto school emphasized outreach to laypersons in a way that simplified or eliminated training with cases because they were too difficult for a nonspecialist to grasp. However, a revival within the Soto school of examining Dogen's complex relation to the koan tradition has been carried out in the post–World War II period of academic studies of the founder's writings.

STAGE IV: GLOBAL PERIOD

Ongoing Spread from Modern East Asia to the West (twentieth–twenty-first centuries)

Period Overview: The history of the modern period and some of the diverse implications and applications of contemporary cross-cultural and pluralistic standpoints is, of course, still being written. The past century is marked by an expansion of studies in koans in

East Asia, along with a boom of interest in Zen abroad, triggered by immigrant evangelists and their Western successors. It has also seen the penetration of koan influences into diverse sociocultural realms in America, ranging from the arts and philosophy to healing and psychotherapy, as well as business and science. There are three substages.

IV.1. Koans in Asia and America (twentieth century)

In the course of the overall development of the tradition, the scholar-official and samurai classes of China, Japan, and Korea applied the ideals of Zen teaching to the sectors of public service and cultural activities, as well as to achieving personal aspirations or career goals. They were able to integrate meditation on a koan case into their everyday behavior in order to attain concrete changes and improvement in their daily lives. In this way, koans have long had a kind of modernist flavor in representing a type of traditional spirituality that could be geared toward an emphasis on individuality characteristic of contemporary society. Despite being rooted in a rather obscure niche of premodern China—the Zen monastery, which was often located in faraway mountains with a handful of dedicated monks—koan discipline seems like it was primed and ready all along to make an impact in today's world of urbanized individualism.

For centuries since the formative era, studying koans has been actively pursued and further developed and enhanced throughout East Asia by both priests and wide-ranging groups of nonclerical scholars, warriors, philosophers, poets, and other learned thinkers. Following periods of revival and reform of koan practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, widespread interest in the mystical exercises that greatly influenced many other aspects of traditional religion and culture, such as the fine and performing arts, remains the mainstay of the rhetorical creativity and practical discipline of Zen.

The koan tradition has been vigorously maintained and enriched during the twentieth century despite severe challenges from the forces of modernization. From a social standpoint, the effects of industrialization and deforestation have made it more difficult to maintain remote mountain temples where koans originated and were first

practiced. Political challenges have also had a great impact. In Japan, Zen had to endure intimidation by the imperial government for several decades leading up to World War II, whereas in China Mao's Cultural Revolution shuttered or destroyed most temples in the 1960s and 1970s. In Korea, Buddhism was suppressed by the government for a number of centuries before undergoing a revival in the twentieth century.

However, Zen has bounced back in all three countries. To compensate, the Rinzai and Soto schools in Japan have each created their own research universities in Kyoto and Tokyo, respectively, and have rebuilt or preserved many of the traditional monasteries. The institutions of higher learning have generated enormous breakthroughs in historical scholarship of koan literature. Scholarly advances in Chinese universities have improved dramatically in the twenty-first century, and in Korea, the Jogye Order has initiated an international movement that attracts foreign researchers and practitioners alike. Moreover, both the flow of tourists visiting ancient shrines and temples and the publication of books and digital resources that deal with koan philosophy and practice continue to expand significantly in all of East Asia.

Another feature of the modern period is that new access to peers through mass communication and transportation networks has made it possible for the first time for representatives of different Zen factions from China and Japan along with Korea and Vietnam to convene group meetings. In addition, leaders of other Buddhist schools as well as interested scholars and practitioners from the West take part in international conferences, where they converse and trade notes about issues of academic history and contemporary practice. The Jogye Order of Korean Zen sponsors regular meetings linking monks and a newly developed approach to recruiting lay followers with worldwide scholarship. These developments have greatly invigorated discussions and debates in regard to the origins and legacy of koan literature.

From the standpoint of globalization, perhaps the main question about the development of the koan tradition has shifted from the perennial query, "Why did Bodhidharma come from the West" (literally, from India to China in the sixth century), to a new scholarly

concern, "Why did Bodhidharma come to the West?" (or, symbolically, from East Asia to America in the twentieth century). Many factors have been at work, including waves of immigration to Hawaii and California as well as a desire on the part of advanced Asian teachers to meet the growing demand abroad for seriously engaging with traditional Buddhist teaching methods. Beginning with D. T. Suzuki at the turn of the twentieth century and going on to include a number of prominent masters who arrived from different parts of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, learning with koans has gained a great following in America. It is often said that the great Korean master Seung Sahn, when teaching in America, acted very much like a Japanese master because he must have felt this was expected of him. Also, Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh has been a significant leader of peace and environmental movements in the West based on Buddhist teachings about nonviolence and an appreciation for naturalism. This trend continues to expand in training centers and other spiritual associations in America.

IV.2. Western Successors (mid- to late twentieth century)

After the introduction of Zen, dramatic changes started taking place in koan rituals to accommodate American social norms. These modifications responded to issues such as how to display the trappings of authority or enforce the rules of monastic behavior in terms of the shifting functions of leaders and followers affected not only by gender roles and sexuality but by social class and other social behavioral elements as well. Koans continue to be widely disseminated, but often in different or newer styles of teaching. However, a common thread with the classic period has been an emphasis on the practice known as *sanzen* (also referred to as *dokusan*), or intensive one-on-one private interview sessions between master and disciple, which are especially important in the Japanese Rinzai school's approach to koan study.

Another key development in contemporary koan studies was the initial translation into English of the *Gateless Gate* in a slim volume called *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones,* which was first published in the 1930s and has been reprinted several times since. In the aftermath, more than a dozen versions of this collection have appeared. In addition,

various renderings, some more reliable than others, of several other classic koan compilations are now available in print and online, some based on scholarly standards and others geared more to practitioners. However, these publishing efforts must be seen as a matter of scratching the surface, so to speak, in that massive numbers of case commentaries that are regularly studied in universities and seminaries in Asia have not yet been translated into English.

IV.3. Recent Cultural Trends (twentieth–twenty-first centuries)

Zen's influence on art forms and other intellectual and commercial endeavors was particularly highlighted in the period after World War II, when Americans were especially eager to learn about and integrate into their daily lives some of the richness of traditional Asian culture. Koans in America today are more than a quaint artifact or a mere museum piece reflecting an irretrievable exotic society. They are being explored in cities and towns all over the country, either at Zen meditation centers, where they are a tool for spiritual development, or as part of the academic curriculum of college courses in which the history of comparative religious thought is learned.

Some examples of koan-related intellectual developments include Beat poetry capturing the sensation of overcoming existential angst; musical composition emphasizing the priority of silence over sounds; modalities of psychotherapy based on freeing the mind from inner complications; scientific investigation involving unusual mind-bending concepts such as quarks and black holes; and entrepreneurship skills of business strategists derived from a savvy and supple way of outsmarting the competition. The values conveyed in koan exercises, such as remaining alert and aware of one's inner strengths, while keeping at bay the opponent in the contest, have been applied to social behavior ranging from corporate strategic planning to self-help and artistic creativity.

An interesting anecdote involving Kobun Chino, the Japanese Zen teacher of Steve Jobs for many years, ties together some of the various strands of the phenomenon of koans coming to the modern West. Once in the 1980s, Kobun, who was also a skilled archer, was asked to demonstrate his craft at an assembly of well-to-do mystical

seekers of all stripes gathered at a fabulous resort along the beautiful California coast. Instead of shooting at the target, however, Kobun abruptly turned his back and drew the bow toward the ocean. When the arrow fell into the great waters below, the audience gasped at what they at first thought was a serious blunder, while the Zen master calmly and confidently declared, "Bull's-eye!" Did this really happen according to accounts in the media, or could the anecdote be exaggerated or embellished as a modern example of hagiography? Does it even matter whether it is accurate or not so long as it gets the point across?

Rhetorical Strategies and Ideological Schisms

In addition to gaining an overview of the history of texts and rites, it is important to understand the styles of rhetoric and philosophical themes that helped shape koan discourse. Some of the diverse cultural influences that greatly affected koan literature include the metaphors of legalism related to passing judgment over spiritual accomplishments, artistic discipline resulting in the spontaneity of illumination, folklore symbolism regarding issues of morality, and art-of-war imagery conjuring the drive and anticipation involved in winning dialogical competitions. These quite varied thematic elements undergird yet transcend many of the issues of doctrine and practice that have been debated over the centuries, sometimes with a great sense of urgency and opposition, by the main branches of Zen.

LEGALISM AND JUDGMENT

All the classic koan collections drew heavily though somewhat sardonically on the imagery of crime and retribution evoked in Tang dynasty courtrooms, an imagery based on examining the records of precedent cases that guided lawful decision making. Using the term "koan" in referring to religious expressions was originally based on the legal model of determining guilt or innocence and pronouncing an indictment deserving of punishment. This was done through a judgment delivered at a magistrate's desk as the results of criminal cases were assessed.

During the Song dynasty, when Zen dialogues were first being compiled, the word "koan" also became the name for a genre of

popular detective novels in which a local official, functioning as a combination of investigator and prosecutor as well as judge and jury, would discover and expose the basis of a misdeed by using the power of keen observation. He unlocked the mystery behind a criminal's transgression and assigned the appropriate retribution to the guilty party, which often involved a form of corporal punishment. Most people in modern China think of the term "koan" strictly in a legal setting and probably would not even recognize the religious meaning. For fans of a TV show that was a favorite in the 1950s and beyond, a comparable breakthrough by an investigator who finally cracks a thorny case and reveals the truth in dramatic fashion before the courtroom is called the "Perry Mason moment."

According to one of the leading classical Chinese Zen philosophers, who characterized the koan in terms of the legal metaphor:

> The public case is the torch of wisdom that illuminates the darkness of passions, the golden scraper that cuts away film clouding the eye, the sharp ax that severs the life-root of birth and death, the divine mirror that reflects the original face of both the sage and the commoner. . . . Each inquiry is like an official promulgating an order or directing people to read regulations and know the law by extinguishing bad thoughts as soon as they arise.

In koan writings, the Zen master assumes the role of the coolly observant local official, who seeks to analyze and help overcome the spiritual deficiencies of his followers. Ignorance and worldly attachment are deserving of chastisement by a charismatic spiritual leader who is the embodiment of judicious authority. Some of the pronouncements used in koans, such as "I will give you thirty blows" if the answer is deficient or, conversely, "I will spare you thirty blows" when the response is correct, are borrowed directly from punitive methods used by the court system.

Rather than handing out penalties as in a legal context, refutations expressed in koan dialogues are designed to trigger an internal experience of self-reflection and redemption on the part of the blameworthy party. Extending the analogy of investigative work, the commentator in the *Blue Cliff Record* praises the way Zen master Xuedou is able to use poetic comments to "wrap up a koan case." In

remarking on another master's sayings about a prominent dialogue, Yuanwu writes, "He solves a double case, and handles all crimes with the same indictment." Furthermore, "A triple case, a quadruple case. He keeps piling up his accomplishments." No ignorant followers will ever get the best of or win a test with an insightful Zen master.

Dialogues involving Zhaozhou fulfill this approach in that the master exposes the misunderstandings in the disciples' limited viewpoints and forces them to accept a new way of thinking. This is achieved through an appropriate form of expression that leads those afflicted with attachment toward reaching the goal of high-minded detachment. As Wumen says in the postscript to the *Gateless Gate,* "I have earnestly presented and wrapped up all these cases based on records of the sayings and doings of the Buddhas and patriarchs without adding any unnecessary words."

However, the overall significance of koans is multifaceted and not limited to any particular perspective, including the legal model. As indicated in Chapter 1, viewing koans is like standing on a Zigzag Bridge, also known as a Nine-Turn Bridge (even if the wings are less

Nine-Turn Bridge. Photo by the author.

numerous than that), which enables those crossing to gaze about and see phenomena from multiple, sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory, angles. The title of an award-winning Korean film from 2003 about the trials and tribulations of a Buddhist monk who tries but cannot remain isolated from worldly affairs evokes the attitude of multiple perspectives in relation to nature: *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring.*

ARTISTIC DISCIPLINE AND SPONTANEITY

Another set of images instilled into koan discourse is that of artistic discipline, which, like practicing Zen meditation, takes much time to master but leads to a spontaneous act of creativity. Koan cases have long been closely associated or merged with a variety of aesthetic endeavors that, like Zen training, were mainly learned through an intensive apprenticeship with a living master. These art forms include the literary (simplicity of haiku poetry), fine (immediacy of brushstroke calligraphy and painting), performing (minimalist expression of Noh theater), practical (austerity of rock gardens and tea ceremony), and martial (concentration required for archery and sword fighting) forms of practice.

All these disciplines, referred to as "ways," or Dao (J. Do), of spiritual development, share with koans an emphasis on using the least amount of verbiage or effort for maximum psychological effect. Demonstrating expertise in at least one of these arts as a natural outgrowth of one's inner awareness has been a required practice for many Zen disciples. This is done not for the sake of exhibiting beauty or making an expression of aesthetic value as an end in and of itself, but as a way of refining and communicating the enlightened mind of the creator. Some of the greatest poets, dramatists, painters, calligraphers, tea masters, and swordsmen were either monks or important lay disciples who diligently studied koan literature as part of their training.

FOLKLORE SYMBOLISM AND MORALITY

Although Zen koans seem to represent the most select levels of culture, like many kinds of refined literature and music worldwide they have integrated frequently imaginative folklore elements into the discourse. Drawing from age-old folktales enhances the symbolism

of koans in regard to learning moral truths as a key turning point leading from transgression to redemption while following the religious pathway and avoiding the consequences of retribution. Evoking the imaginary realm of the supernatural is an ideal way to comment on the travails undergone in the natural world through using lively stories that appeal to children of all ages.

Audiences have noted how Mozart's final and most famous opera, *The Magic Flute,* composed in the 1790s, utilized various folklore motifs in its approach to both music and storytelling. As told with an opposing mix of bawdy farce and lofty ideals, in this type of theatrical production it was said by a knowledgeable observer, "the road to enlightenment was often paved with damsels in need of rescue, exotic scenic elements riddled with magical tricks, and an occasional talking animal." The same could be said of koan narratives, which feature an odd yet intriguing cast of characters. Cases in the *Gateless Gate* include a lovelorn lady and a wise granny, hermits and other irregular practitioners, a shape-shifting fox and an eternal yet unfulfilled Buddha, masters who sever fingers or arms or cut animals in two, and fans that fly up to the heavens, in addition to premonitory dreams and visions.

ART-OF-WAR IMAGERY AND COMPETITION

The main models for human behavior evoked in koan writings are the scholar and hermit, who are humble, determined, and astute, along with the soldier, who is vigilant, loyal, and brave. The qualities that link these seemingly opposite models of reclusion and activity are a shared set of virtues, such as dedication, alertness, and a self-sacrificing commitment to fight for a higher cause, along with flexibility and a willingness to adjust ideas and attitudes as appropriate for particular circumstances. Martial imagery also contributes to koan discourse the importance of competition in determining the outcome of a dialogue. Attaining knowledge of the dharma involves an ultimate contest between two parties engaged in a perpetual mutual struggle. There is room for only one victor, although both parties may be able to gain or lose status through engagement in the contest.

A Zen saying borrowed from art-of-war literature about dealing with the battlefield says that a true master is like a general who

carries out his strategies while remaining inside the tent. He does not have to sweat the details, so to speak, but can sit back and enjoy the scene because his planning is extremely thorough and its implementation through the work of minions is most effective. In addition, koan commentaries such as *Gateless Gate* case 11 evoke the image of the double-edged sword or the use of a weapon that both kills and gives life. This symbolizes that all great stratagems must have the capacity to destroy the enemy, ignorance, while illuminating participants in that competition helps dialogical partners heighten their self-awareness. Omori Sogen, a modern Japanese Rinzai master, was known for integrating insights from his martial and fine arts training with traditional Zen methods in an approach described as a unity of Zen with *ken,* or sword, referring to martial arts or physical culture, and *sho,* or brush, referring to calligraphy or fine arts.

SCHOOLS AND SCHISMS

From the onset of the koan tradition, a fundamental source of tension or conflict eventually led to harsh sectarian debates about the role of speech and silence in forming and practicing this discourse. Koans were originally oral teachings that were not supposed to be written down. However, once the dialogues that form the core literary unit of cases were extensively recorded in voluminous collections, they became a new method of teaching that was examined for its literary elements. The main feature of the classic period of Zen in East Asia was the production of koan compilations with elaborate commentaries influenced by the writing styles of literati and studied by monks in training.

Many interpreters rejected the role of literature in relation to meditation and endorsed the seemingly opposite tendency of highlighting minimalist expression or silence. These masters found the use of rhetorical flourish to be self-contradictory and tried to enforce a policy of avoiding expressiveness by emphasizing the standpoint of abbreviation. As endorsed by Dahui and his many followers within the Linji/Rinzai school, phrases like "cypress tree" were extracted from a longer dialogue as a shortcut technique that did not require further explanation. Critical phrases were important not for the meanings they evoked, but because taken out of their narrative context they

became symbolic indicators of a higher truth lying beyond and defying the use of words.

According to this standpoint, critical phrases function as a poison used to contradict poison, to cite a saying regularly used in Korean Zen's keyword method of training. Koans are heuristic devices, like the proverbial finger pointing to the moon or the fishnet or hare's trap, as in a Daoist parable attributed to the great philosopher Zhuangzi. These analogies refer to tools that are in the end to be cast aside once the goal of catching the prey is realized. In that sense, koans fulfill the notion of Zen as a special transmission independent of words and letters, since trainees are forbidden from reading or conversing about additional commentaries. Rather than a vehicle for exploring the significance of Zhaozhou's life or the symbolism of the cypress tree for grasping the inner meaning of the case, the koan provides a contemplative means of shutting down altogether a reliance on language and logic.

A prime example of an approach to meditation based on highlighting the effective role of truncation concerns another koan attributed to Zhaozhou in which a monk asks whether, since all beings are said to possess the principle of Buddha-nature, this is true even for a dog, cited earlier in discussing Taego's life. The master replies, "No," which literally indicates denial but could suggest absolute nothingness beyond ordinary distinctions of negation and affirmation, and thus ironically indicates "yes." According to Dahui's approach, one should not deliberate on the term, but simply try to awaken to its mystical power to eliminate reason. Those who contemplate the "No" koan are warned to avoid "ten defects," or deficient ways of thinking that detract from genuine insight, by using negation to ponder abstract topics like nature or ultimate reality.

However, another school of koan interpretation celebrates the diversity and complexity of the literary embellishments that were included in the vast storehouse of case collections. Elaborate rhetoric is seen as an essential ingredient of the overall koan experience, which carries with it the legacy of intense participation by poets and other highly educated literati. An important element of the literary approach that was mainly endorsed by all factions during the classic period is that koans were often associated with the term "tangled

vines" (C. *geteng,* J. *katto*). This term suggests the importance of building and interpreting a complex web of associations and allusions that permeate dialogues and commentaries. The two characters used in the term are bivalent, with the first referring to the destructive tendrils of the invasive kudzu (a loan word from Japanese) vine, which can also have beneficial uses in medicine, diet, and basket weaving. The second character refers to the beautiful blossoms of the enchanting wisteria vine, which can also be deleterious to other vegetation. In traditional Chinese wedding rites, the image of tangled vines functions as a metaphor for the ceremonial binding and bonding of marriage partners and their extended families.

For Zen advocates of the literary approach, tangled vines can signify complications of entanglements, but this is not to be understood in a negative sense. Rather, entanglements represent a thoroughly productive means of capturing the multiple implications of enlightenment by evoking, usually indirectly or through allusion, previous writings from Zen and other forms of literature. Seen in that vein, koans are compared to intertwined tendrils that enable ongoing discussions and explanations of various images and symbols without regard for finding a clear and decisive conclusion to the spiritual pathway.

The main schools of Zen constitute multifaceted ideologies that should not be stereotyped or reduced to simplistic formulas. However, because of the legacy of sectarian divisiveness stemming from the Song dynasty in China and reinforced in the Edo period in Japan as well as in various periods of Korean history, the branches of Zen are often depicted today in both Asian and Western textbooks as standing firmly in opposition. The typical picture is that Rinzai supports the method of abbreviation and Soto endorses elaboration. As with most generalizations, there is some truth to that outlook but it does not tell the whole story; there are many examples of either crossover or exceptional standpoints.

An important episode from the Song dynasty illustrates the complexity of evaluating the standpoints of Zen factions. Yuanwu's *Blue Cliff Record* is considered the hallmark koan collection for the most part endorsing the literary approach. His main disciple, Dahui, was also his main critic and, it is said, burned the xylographs of the text, thus putting it out of circulation for nearly two centuries, until it was

restored by devoted readers. While these two Linji/Rinzai masters were in dispute, Caodong/Soto master Dogen lovingly copied and brought the text to Japan. He praised Yuanwu lavishly but was a fierce opponent of Dahui's approach.

One way of assessing the relation between the two interpretative standpoints in terms of complementarity instead of contradiction is to consider that abbreviation is particularly relevant for practitioners who begin the path. Regardless of sectarian identity or whether the practitioner is a monastic or lay trainee, his or her main goal is to steady the mind during meditation. The flourishing of allusions within the literary realm, on the other hand, makes koan collections a compelling body of writing to be analyzed by the advanced scholar or philosopher. These thinkers seek to assess the overall significance of case records in terms of both traditional East Asian Buddhist and contemporary comparative mystical literature and religious thought. The *Gateless Gate* is a particularly noteworthy commentary that can be, and over the centuries has been, endorsed by all parties for the way it strikes a balance by featuring creative interpretative comments that are kept brief and to the point.

CHAPTER 3

On Methods to the Madness of Koans

A New Theory of Interpretation

Koans to Live By: Issues in Creating Interpretations

Despite an appearance of disarming simplicity owing to their brevity and wit, koan cases are anything but straightforward and thus are not easily defined or classified. In fact, they are deliberately mystifying and reason defying, if not necessarily irrational, and this inherently puzzling and paradoxical quality undermines and defeats superficial interpretations. Nevertheless, to formulate a theoretical framework for exploring multiple levels of significance uncovered in the rhetoric of case records, it is crucial to resist relegating Zen dialogues to the realm of the absurd. Instead, it is important to recognize that koans tell stories about enlightenment that make sense once the narrative structure reflecting diverse thematic elements is clearly discerned and described. The functions of storytelling in koans that are instructive and inspirational should be examined carefully yet critically in light of the tradition's historical development. These spiritual factors must also be understood not only in relation to the contexts of legalism, fine arts, folklore, and art-of-war imagery, but also with an awareness of the continuing impact of intense sectarian ideological disputes.

The methods that we will use to understand koans, which are also used for other traditions in religious studies, take into account sociocultural influences on the development of Zen in order to explain what sense case narratives make so they can be comprehended in a systematic way. However, this approach may stand in contrast to a

number of recent popular readings of koans, which focus on how cases point beyond reason. Since absurdity is considered crucial to what is most intriguing and thought provoking about case records, numerous contemporary commentators highlight the nonsensical rather than the sensible side of koan discourse. In doing so, however, they may lose sight of the complex formative factors that shaped the composition of the source narratives.

Some of the cynical critics of Zen refer to case records as a highly refined but, in the final analysis, disguised and duplicitous form of twisted and incomprehensible oratory. Koans used in the modern world are said to hide in the pretense of replicating an archaic and essentially irrelevant doctrine. Some skeptics in the West, ranging from missionaries to cultural commentators such as Arthur Koestler, who claimed that Eastern meditation turned humans into robots, have attacked koan literature for constituting nothing more than nonsensical utterances or a relentless kind of mumbo-jumbo or fanciful gobbledygook that is designed to befuddle and obfuscate, and do no more. The Zen koan seems like some oddity extracted from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or a Gilbert and Sullivan libretto, whose only sense lies in making nonsense or conveying a random quality in which "no" means "yes" or a tree is more (or perhaps less) than a tree.

This distrustful attitude is powerfully expressed in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (*Kinkakuji*), a famous Japanese novel published in the late 1950s by renowned author Yukio Mishima. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is based on a real incident in which a disabled young acolyte burned down a famous medieval monastery in Kyoto during the American occupation of Japan. The temple had once been the moon-viewing pavilion for a shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, who repented at the end of his life in 1408 and donated the facility to the Zen sect. Note that in the picture of the temple, its reflection in the pond below can look as real as the actual building. Made of wood construction with gold plating, rare for a Buddhist monastery in Japan, the temple had been destroyed by fire during a late-fifteenth-century civil war battle and rebuilt to appear as old as the original building.

Temple of the Golden Pavilion. Photo by the author.

According to Mishima's account, which reflected his careful reading of the 1950 trial transcripts, a mishandling of koan rhetoric lay at the root of the trainee's distress. Case records were deliberately interpreted in vague and indecipherable ways by the corrupt and lecherous temple abbot in order to keep his disciple at a psychological distance. Whenever a concern or crisis arose—ranging from military affairs and the possible bombing of Kyoto to the abbot's scandalous personal behavior or the protagonist's severe social problems as a stutterer—the high priest failed to demonstrate leadership that would have helped the troubled novice. Instead, he resorted to spouting out, and thereby shrouding himself in, mystifying discourses based on koans. This shielded him psychologically while also preventing a forthright encounter with current social as well as personal issues. This maddening behavior eventually drove the trainee to commit arson. The act of destruction, in Mishima's electrifying novel, felt like his only means of escaping from a stiflingly claustrophobic situation. The temple abbot's teaching method can be com-

pared with the silent treatment given to trainees in some other mystical traditions in order to strengthen the learner's spiritual resolve, which might backfire for the wrong person.

Mishima was well-known for being a fiercely loyal nationalist and apologist for imperial Shinto during the post–World War II period. The author committed traditional suicide (*seppuku*, or *hara-kiri*) in a public spectacle in downtown Tokyo in 1970 as part of a staged government coup. Thus, he was inclined to repudiate Buddhism, which he considered a problematic foreign ideology, a suspicion that has a long legacy in East Asia stemming from the time of the suppression of all non-native religions in China in 845. Still, some of his insights ring true in regard to the foibles of the sometimes autocratic Zen temple system, which over the years has seen financial misdeeds and sexual indiscretions cloaked by cultic secrecy in all of East Asia.

Supporters of Zen adamantly dispute claims that koans are used in inappropriate or invalid ways. They argue that the primary aim of studying cases is to promote serenity by compelling trainees to surpass petty conflicts. This is a lofty and generally unattainable goal that is easily misrepresented by outsiders to the practice or mishandled by a couple of crackpot leaders. Even Mishima's critical authorial voice may be supportive, between the lines, of the way the abbot uses the koan case of a cat getting cut in two in his sermon, given that the war was ending. This story becomes an ideal metaphor to point out the futility of all human conflict, even though the novice was not able to grasp the significance of the abbot's cryptic case commentary.

Yet, advocates of the koan tradition may end in agreement with detractors by similarly maintaining that trying to detect meanings in the words of a case record is a lost cause. For many devotees, attempting to evaluate a case in a systematic way is at odds with the purpose of these exercises, which is to eliminate any trace of logical thought. Therefore, historical and literary studies of koan literature are not considered to be valuable evidence in regard to the significance of practice based on these records.

Another difficulty in determining the meaning of koans occurs when taking into account how the Linji/Rinzai and Caodong/Soto schools have fiercely contested their role in Zen practice. Over the centuries, these two factions have accused each other of articulating

deficient or heretical teachings. The current Rinzai approach puts greater emphasis on meditation based on investigating keyword phrases extracted from case records, whereas the Soto approach stresses silent awakening without consciously thinking about a case's significance. No easy compromise between the schools can be reached. This discord leaves an impartial observer, who tries to construe accurately the history and ideology of case records, scratching his or her head from an uneasy sense that the self-presentation of the tradition based on apology or advocacy is confused or misleading. Modern research, therefore, needs to discover and elucidate, rather than dismiss or suppress, the causes and consequences of sectarian conflict.

Are koans somewhat like a Rorschach test, whereby beauty (or ugliness) lies in the eye of the beholder, who in effect is given license to read just about anything he or she may want to see into the nebulous and eccentric template of a case? Or is there a method to the madness of koans? I argue that a study of koan records shows how a practitioner accomplishes spiritual goals by following a strange and unorthodox pathway that is actually based on a clear and cogent plan of action standing behind apparently unfathomable words in addition to the idiosyncrasies of partisan polemics. This route leads to unexpected yet remarkably productive results in the quest for attaining authentic spirituality.

My goal is to develop an explanation of levels of meanings revealed in koans in a manner that is comprehensive and compelling and could be endorsed by representatives of different factions. Despite sectarian discord, after all, there are two main practices that just about every Zen master agrees must be followed: zazen, or sitting meditation, and koans. Leaders may debate whether it is best to meditate while facing the wall to eliminate distraction or turned toward the group, which can heighten concentration. There may be conflicts about using more or less rhetoric in practicing with and interpreting case records. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there is an underlying sense of unity in utilizing both of these spiritual techniques to their utmost capacity in the quest for enlightenment. Zen attitudes tend to be exclusive in argumentation but, in the end, inclusive in terms of actual practice.

The method used here recovers and restores the unconventional yet thoroughly substantial notions of sense and reasoning that rest at the foundation of most koan records. This approach to forming a theoretical model elucidates how koans evoke personal transformation, or the attainment and expression of a breakthrough experience to self-realization, in addition to monastic transmission, or the management of a process for selecting and appointing successors to the lineage. By explaining that there is a systematic procedure and progression used in koan training, this book develops an integrated interpretative way of explicating sagacity within apparent inconsistency.

The approach also acknowledges some of the possible psychic pitfalls, as exposed by Mishima and other critics, that may be caused by the innate ambiguity of Zen dialogues, resulting in equivocal and opposing interpretations that confound many readers who are not so well informed of the koans' historical and cultural context. However, it is important to see that a trainee uses uncertainty deliberately as a rhetorical strategy and pedagogical tool in order to elicit a certain reaction. It is not, or at least should not be, evoked for the sake of promoting opacity as the final goal.

Research conducted to write this book seeks to perpetuate the legacy of the koan tradition by clarifying the steps involved in the ongoing practice of this vibrant avenue to spiritual realization. The approach mitigates various modern forces, ranging from cynicism to romanticism, which tend to relegate koans to the realm of a quaint museum piece much like the kimono or kabuki. If koans are seen as an exotic oddity or as the sole possession of insiders, then they are vulnerable to criticism or misunderstanding. They can become an easy target for refutation by skeptics, who are disinterested and disinclined, or contrariwise, koans can remain aloof and immune from careful examination for supporters who accept too eagerly or uncritically the premises of Zen philosophy. Either of these views tends to distort the history and philosophy of koan records.

This methodology is based in part on the notion that there are, in effect, "koans to live by." In a frequently cited work about how language functions in society, *Metaphors We Live By,* published in 1980, authors George Lakoff and Mark Johnson demonstrate that everyday

verbal expression is filled with various kinds of useful metaphors. Because these figures of speech, such as "prices are rising" or "the sun is setting," are used so routinely, they appear to be clear but may have complicated meanings that are not readily recognized, and so their functions are not always noticed or examined carefully. Yet a variety of metaphors determine the general way people think and act.

A comparable role is played by the literary richness involving metaphors and other examples of rhetoric that was formed in traditional East Asian koan literature and continues to impact modern intellectual life east and west. So much of the verbiage used in a typical case and its commentaries may seem impractical or gets easily glossed over as a mere cultural oddity, or placed by eager devotees on a pedestal of idealization. However, koan discourse frames how we understand East Asian thought and culture and therefore demands a thorough analysis. If viewed from an objective and neutral historical vantage point, koan records invariably disclose important features of the ideology and practice of Zen along with various ways this religious training technique operates in classic and contemporary settings in Asia and America.

In any given case record, there stands a complex set of psychological circumstances and accompanying web of semantic associations. These involve the life of a Zen master, including his distinctive style of teaching, along with the spiritual aspirations of the trainee and the roles of other personalities, ideas, or events connected with the main dialogue. From the example of Zhaozhou's cypress tree, we see that sparse words are used to create maximum emotional effect. In addition, the case reveals a moral lesson about the need to resist a subconscious tendency to overlook one's surroundings or ignore the small details of life situations. We also appreciate the tree's symbolism in regard to the teachings of Bodhidharma and Zhaozhou, as well as resonances with related dialogues of the classic period.

Undertaking a neutral study of koan expressions is part of being a "dharma detective," to cite a term used by one of the leaders of the San Francisco Zen Center. The center was founded in the early 1960s by the eminent Japanese monk Shunryu Suzuki of the Soto school and is still one of the most active institutions in America. The idea is

that an investigator of Zen teachings should use some of the intellectual techniques embedded in koan literature, such as keen observation of details, while dispensing with preformed opinions or ideological biases. This hopefully leads to a few Perry Mason moments in clarifying various examples of case records. But there may also be interpretative dead ends and shortfalls. There can be no claims to achieving a single, conclusive resolution to the mystery of what makes koan case records tick.

Koans as High-Stakes Gambit

A koan case almost always revolves around a basic dialogue that took place long ago in the Tang dynasty and is deceptively simple yet at the same time open-ended and ambivalent. This kind of exchange is by no means a typical matter of posing a question and receiving an answer, since the queries are excessively imprecise or broad and the replies are deliberately too indirect or inconclusive. The ambiguity of a Zen dialogue is designed to leave a perplexed reader who is frustrated with solving the puzzle wiping his or her brow—or, if the madness gets the best of the reader, "chomping at rotting bones" or "running around in circles like a mouse caught in a maze," to cite a couple of sayings used in some traditional commentaries. However, students of koan literature are generally eager to learn more about the backstory of enigmatic encounters in order to see how these may shed light on their own spiritual journey.

A review of various dialogues used in the *Gateless Gate* and other classic collections shows that several patterns of the philosophical exchanges can be discerned. Some of the most famous examples take the form of a novice's ineffective query about Buddha or Bodhidharma that generally evokes some amusingly mundane image in the master's response. The question directly or indirectly raises a profound issue concerning Buddhist doctrine dealing with reality, human perception, the role of language, or the natural environment. The answer exposes that authentic concern lies not with abstract ideation but with concrete experience. The indirection of the master's reply creates an emotional turnaround that suddenly makes any seemingly counterproductive query supremely consequential and rewarding.

In other instances, a master's unanswerable question is presented to a monk in training in order to create a command or demand that fosters a sense of urgency or panic by challenging either the trainee's standing in the community or his very existence. Shoved up against the wall or hung over the edge of a cliff, figuratively or sometimes literally, the trainee must be able to respond on the spot and without delay since any slight degree of hesitation might reveal his "curly tail," symbolizing fox-like spiritual deficiencies, and lead to catastrophic results.

While most Zen dialogues consist of the interface of teacher and disciple, other patterns include encounters between two masters as if in a duel, or a master who is being challenged by an irregular or non-Buddhist practitioner. This may be an emperor or a hermit, an ethereal bodhisattva or an old woman at the roadside, a shape-shifting fox or some other kind of spirit. In *Gateless Gate* case 32, for instance, the Buddha meets a philosopher from a different religious school, whereas in case 36 a master confronts a nondescript "Man of Dao," who may or may not represent Zen enlightenment.

In an intriguing example of an unusual type of interaction, in case 12 master Ruiyan calls out with a sense of uncertainty every night, but the cries are answered by nobody other than himself, with the replies "Stay wide awake" and "Never let yourself be deceived by others." Wumen comments, "Old Ruiyan buys and sells himself . . . but if you try to imitate him, your views are nothing other than those of a wild fox." Why does Ruiyan resort to this unfathomable self-afflictive activity? The story behind the story indicates that as a brash young upstart, he had readily outsmarted a master but gloated about his prowess. Later in life, he was haunted by his memories of former arrogance and this seemingly perverse communication was a legitimate way of acknowledging and overcoming his previously foolish behavior.

All of the parties engaged in a Zen dialogue recognize that adversaries of various sorts are contesting the turf they protect, such as a particular school of thought or their temple grounds. They need to step up to the plate, so to speak, in order to defend their valuables. Precious jewels are a typical metaphor for Buddha-nature. The strength of one's innermost character in trying to guard and promote concep-

tual or actual territory is being tested to the core. This conflict transpires in a highly compressed yet all-encompassing time frame that is both fleeting and kaleidoscopic. Every element of religious training and accomplishment that enters into determining the outcome needs to be summoned at one decisive moment. An instant of delay can lead to devastating consequences.

Newt Gingrich, in a television interview, referred to the type of confrontation in the 2012 presidential debates as a kind of koan exercise. "For both men," he said, "it is a chance to reintroduce themselves to the largest audience in the campaign to date. The debate at one level is almost a Zen moment—Who is this person? What's the larger story? What are we watching? What's the drama we're watching?" This comment suggests that the aim of a Zen-based exchange is to strip bare the pretensions and illusions of, in the case of presidential politics, fund-raising and public relations drives based on simplistic campaign slogans and sound bites. This exposure bares the soul of the candidate by disclosing his inward motivations and visions for the future direction of the people he hopes to lead.

Another way of characterizing the intensity of the high-stakes gambit of Zen dialogues is to think of the bottom of the ninth inning of the seventh game of the World Series in baseball or the fourth-quarter red-zone play in football, an eighteenth-hole putt in golf, twelfth-round scoring in boxing, a fifth-set tiebreaker in tennis, or a checkmate move in chess. It could be any occasion in which one must give it all one has while being forced to become abruptly and publicly aware that whatever shortcomings or failures there are will be quickly uncovered. Let the chips fall. This event can take place before public onlookers, as when a Perry Mason–like lawyer makes his convincing closing argument. Or it may occur in the intimacy of one's own home in dealing with family, or by introspection through looking at oneself in the proverbial mirror.

In the topsy-turvy world of koan cases, it is just as likely that the outcast or underdog, like Huineng, emerges as the winner against an accomplished figure. But never sell short the capacity of an established master, such as Bodhidharma, to prevail against all odds. Having a trick up the sleeve gives way in the end to the priority of integrity and conviction in determining the result of the contest. In many case

commentaries, however, the better the master's performance, the more mocking is the capping-phrase remark about its function. This is done to show that nobody stands above the fray. Like a gunslinger in the Wild West or a swordfighter in warlord Asia, you are only as good as your last victory.

Field of Transcendence: Narrative and Rhetorical Structures

The aim of koan exercises is to transport a practitioner from the mundane world characterized by ignorance and attachments to a field of spiritual transcendence that is always available but rarely seen. Therefore, koan cases reveal how and why an unenlightened yet aspiring seeker must struggle intellectually and emotionally—indeed, with his or her whole being—in order to clarify seemingly obscure or convoluted ideas and twisted verbal expressions. Through the vehicle of the dialogue in which obscurity is enhanced, a sudden breakthrough into an understanding of the true nature of self and world is realized.

A "gateless gate," Zen practice maintains that there is really no barrier that stands in the way or needs to be crossed to attain this realm, and yet the impasse appears to be insurmountable and the obstacles endless for those who are struggling along the path. Once the transcendental field of enlightenment is realized, a trained person's inner being is transformed through overcoming every impediment while undergoing a symbolic resonance with all the previous Buddhas and patriarchs. Furthermore, the new level of self-realized knowledge is capable of being transmitted to followers by teachers who succeed in developing and cultivating their own distinctive training techniques.

The relation between transcendence and the two main components of transformation and transmission is illustrated in Figure 3.1. This figure indicates that the process of achieving transcendence involves a clear sense of sequence from the standpoint of progressing through delineated stages of development. The initial step of the process of spiritual attainment through learning koan cases is to realize personal transformation. One must gain truth, first, before being able to go to the second stage of passing the torch of inner awareness on

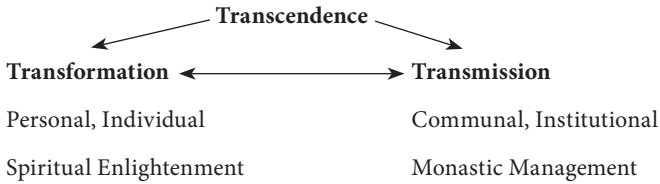


Figure 3.1. The Relation between Transcendence, Transformation, and Transmission

to others. At the same time, there is no real separation between steps, which are mutually reinforcing and simultaneously supportive aspects of the transcendental field. Trainees are constantly challenging attained masters, thus causing the teachers to renew their own awareness by, in a sense, beginning the process all over again. Conversely, some trainees who have not yet realized the final level of reality may be able to transmit the degree of insight they have reached thus far, while still treading the path.

Surveying various case records indicates that there is no fixed formula to be employed as key to the process of realizing transcendence. Whatever rhetorical strategy works for a particular disciple is utilized based on the master's judgment in accord with the specific set of circumstances. In some instances, this means using wordplay or a verbal sleight of hand, and in other examples it involves dispensing with language entirely while pointing to silence or delivering a blow. In some instances, a supernatural drama is effective in highlighting moral symbolism, while other cases feature concrete phenomena, even when—or precisely because—this image seems out of place or ludicrous in its ethereal setting. Literary conceit is never fully removed from koan discourse. Wumen's prose and poetic comments display eloquence, though in a more streamlined and restrained manner than many other koan collections of the classic period featuring the extensive use of elaborate capping phrases.

Gazing out from the perspective of the field of transcendence, the master can see that whatever lies at the root of the trainee's problem determines the type of solution to be utilized to enable him to break free of delusion. For instance, if the ignorant party thinks that all

problems are due to external objects, then he must be reminded to understand that nothing, including a solid stone, stands apart from the mind, which is the basis of all human perception. But, should the trainee then take this instruction too literally, the master will probably mock him for carrying heavy rocks in his head. No single standpoint on its own is considered strictly either true or false, but each in its own partial and limited way has the potential to disclose truth.

Furthermore, several main rhetorical patterns emerge from scanning diverse cases, including discourse based on emphatic negation of conventional categories, a reversal from previously held views, oxymoron or non sequitur to disarm the interlocutor by disabling his dependence on logic, and paradox, in which opposites at once collide and are brought into harmony. Regardless of which of these strategies is used, the aim is to help place the practitioner in closer proximity to or even all the way through the proverbial gateless barrier that leads to transcendence. By understanding how various narrative and rhetorical techniques function in classic collections of koan cases, we can see how the gate can be crossed and to what extent this is accomplished with ease or difficulty.

The process of transcendence is driven by the dialogical structure of the conversation, in which an all-too-brief question-and-answer results in the much grander spiritual give-and-take of an enlightened party's testing and contesting with an unenlightened interlocutor. This is done in pursuit of higher reality, which is somehow suggested through, while lying beyond, the actual words spoken or gestures demonstrated. Out of the sparks created through the friction of interaction between untruth and opaque responses, impenetrable truth emerges. Ignorance, which is compared in koan commentaries to being unable to recognize what is right before your nose, is destroyed by wisdom, which is like a mighty swift sword that cuts through illusions.

Within the dynamics of the transcendental field, the level of personal transformation refers to the way the exchanges at once capture and help trigger a spontaneous experience of awakening by overcoming attachments, altering the mind, and expressing spiritual attainment through appropriately indirect language. The breakthrough is usually based on an ignorant party at first suffering a comeuppance at

the hands of his master. This represents a painful but necessary first step in overcoming delusion by heightening anxiety. Like tearing weeds out of the ground at their root, it is done in order to cast aside illusions. The teacher uses the rhetoric of dismay and disdain, or satire and sarcasm, toward his humbled follower with digs like, "He adds frost to snow." This indicates that everything the trainee says is unoriginal so that no new ideas or words can be expected to come out of that ignoramus's mouth. Similarly, I think of an old TV ad for aftershave in which someone with a rough complexion is grabbed at the collar and slapped in the face by a so-called friend holding the lotion in his hand. The guy receiving the slap cries out, "Thanks, I needed that!"

Once it is resolved—either by being wrapped up or untied, to cite two opposing but comparable metaphors used in diverse koan commentaries—any given case conveys an overarching narrative of a serene and imperturbable awakened party disclosing his feeling of oneness with the "original face," or true nature. This instant of insight is often symbolized by the images of clearing skies revealing a bright sun, the refreshing spring breeze, or colorful autumn leaves. According to a typical Zen refrain attributed to master Yunmen, "Every day is a good day" if it is grounded in enlightenment. Other symbols of sudden awakening are a shooting star, a flash of lightning, and a small blade hacking apart hard rock. All these images are intense while they last, yet ultimately fleeting.

Whereas the level of transformation highlights the role of individual subjectivity in surpassing ignorance in order to realize truth, the second facet in my theory of koan interpretation features the institutional role of monastic transmission. This refers to the function of cases in terms of how a master ensures the pedigree and protocol of disciples who receive his training. Even though dialogues appear as freewheeling exchanges that epitomize impudence, koans are also used to transfer Zen teachings based on the strict behavioral guidelines of temple life. These rules are often challenged not only by naïve, immature, or irregular practitioners. On occasion, the masters themselves express concern that strict regulations regarding ritual roles played by robes, bells, flags, and screens may seem somewhat arbitrary relative to the open-endedness of enlightenment.

Irreverence lies at the heart of many koans. Disciples were embarrassed or, in other instances, encouraged to speak out in order to trump their mentors, who were compelled to acknowledge the rebuff when appropriate. Some followers slapped their teachers, as in the final episode of *Gateless Gate* case 2, when Huangbo is praised by master Baizhang for being a "red-bearded barbarian," that is, of the same venerated status as Bodhidharma. In case 4 of the *Blue Cliff Record,* a brash young monk named Deshan charges unannounced into the inner sanctum of master Guishan. When he is not satisfied with the master's silent reaction, he abruptly leaves the temple grounds after shaking his sleeves, a sign of displeasure in a trope borrowed from romantic poetry of the era. After his departure, Deshan thinks better of his behavior. When he returns and acts more respectfully, he receives the highest praise from the no longer offended Guishan by saying that he will be able to revile the Buddhas and patriarchs.

The leaders of Zen monasteries became wary of the way this apparent lack of decorum, even if it was intended mainly as a tongue-in-cheek rhetorical device, might be perceived as disrespectful by skeptical outsiders such as government officials. In response, some interpreters fashioned ways of explaining koan dialogues as a means of reminding disciples of the need for maintaining institutional hierarchy. The instruction was that trainees must comply dutifully with the commands of the master or risk harsh punishment, ranging from thirty blows of the staff to banishment from the temple grounds as the most severe penalty.

Nearly all koan records to some degree reflect both aspects of transformation and transmission. Yet each dialogue has its own particular emphasis. For instance, in the case of the cypress tree, Zhaozhou's reply throws his novice off guard to create a ball of doubt. This is done in order to spark a momentary flash of intuition that alleviates attachment to unedifying concerns. While transformation is the driving force for this dialogue, the "wash your bowl" dialogue highlights transmission. In that case, the master's goal is to test and determine whether the disciple is truly dedicated and may someday become a worthy successor. Between the two main levels of transformation and transmission occurs the complex and rewarding dynamic of advancing toward the goal of transcendence. This occurs as a topsy-

turvy realm in which snubs become incentives and insults are forms of praise, or vice versa.

Returning to the pathway koans provide to transcendence, the overall story unfolds through a narrative structure covering six phases of this spiritual process that helps build emotional interest and create didactic instructions for the reader. The first three stages include the pursuit, fulfillment, and dissemination of truth. These are followed by the emergence of a moral crisis, resolution, and closure to the tale through selecting the correct follower. Based on this analysis of the stages of the process, the levels of transformation and transmission emanating from the field of transcendence can each be broken down into three component parts corresponding to the structural elements that enable the story to be told in a compelling fashion.

The narrative concerning the quest for transformation includes three main structural elements:

1. *Doubt* in pursuit of the goal of spiritual fulfillment by calling into question all assumptions and presuppositions as the necessary opening phase in the process of shedding delusions
2. *Experience* via the spontaneous breakthrough of a flash of understanding, which indicates that the goal has been attained after a lengthy period of struggles and challenges
3. *Expression* by disseminating words about self-realization so as to communicate the path to enlightenment in a way that illumines but does not distort truth or give it away too easily

Similarly, the process of transmission also covers three structural elements:

4. *Mythology* evoking folklore symbolism in order to deal with a moral crisis arising in an individual or among a group of followers that challenges a master's authority or integrity
5. *Monasticism* by emphasizing behavioral regulations needing to be enforced while being balanced with the open-ended flexibility of an awakened state of mind
6. *Succession* through choosing a true disciple, which ensures completion and brings closure to the account of the attainment and transference of enlightenment

Some koans, like the ones about Zhaozhou's cypress tree, associated with the element of doubt, and his breakfast bowl, reflective of an emphasis on monasticism, may seem one-dimensional, at least at first glance, in highlighting a particular aspect of the narrative structure. In other instances, case records may exhibit a more complicated approach to telling the tale of enlightenment that covers two or more elements. Sometimes, the complexity of the case narrative is veiled or enhanced by intricate allusions to traditional Zen lore and legends. These metaphors are accessible for those learned in the tradition but may be difficult to recognize if one is not well versed. However, even if not understood at first glance, allusions and references tend to draw a reader into the deeper levels of the narrative by inviting creative inquiry and exploratory ruminations. Zen dialogues are constructed so as to counter and undermine conventional thinking in a way that provokes a pondering mind to probe further by seeking to explain the unexplainable free of conjecture or bias.

Huineng's Powerful Robe

Case 23, which is known as "Thinking of neither Good nor Evil" or "Huineng's Robe," is one of the more intricate case records in the *Gateless Gate* collection and combines all six structural elements in a single compelling story, although the sequence of the developmental phases is somewhat altered. This case illustrates one of the most important and dramatic events in the early history of Zen, which supposedly took place at a crucial turning point when there was a struggle for succession. This was not only a personal matter; it also involved the single major transition in the development of the expanding religious movement. The event, as expressed in the *Platform Sutra,* marked the transfer of authority from the Northern school to the new dominance of the Southern school, which was based on the life and teaching of Huineng in the Tang dynasty.

The narrative of case 23 is derived from the traditional account that, after Huineng's insightful verse was deemed superior to his rival's quatrain because of its greater emphasis on nonduality, the jealous opponents at the monastery were none too pleased. They did not appreciate that an illiterate southerner, who they felt was lucky to have been accepted into the monastic system in the first place, would

now become heir to the abbot's throne, thereby bypassing the established hierarchy of monks. The newly anointed sixth patriarch was warned by fifth patriarch Hongren that jealous rivals would do everything possible to capture the two main symbols of transmission: the robe and begging bowl. Huineng fled from the monastery to the countryside, but the chase to find him was started immediately by head monk Ming, a former military general, who refused to tolerate what he considered an untrained rube's ascension.

The dramatic impact of this record consists of several emotionally charged and historically significant mini-dialogues strung together to form a unified story. It rests mainly on the ritual importance and supernatural claims made for one of the key symbols of lineal transmission: the ceremonial robe. Along with the begging bowl, representing a practitioner's humility, the robe, which once belonged to Bodhidharma, was supposedly handed down from generation to generation in the successive string of patriarchs. In any event, the robe and bowl had long been the only two possessions of Buddhist monks, who led a lifestyle based on austerity and penitence.

Throughout the history of Buddhism, there was considerable debate about the color, material, and quality of the robe to be used by temple-based monastics as well as wandering ascetics. In China, an important area of controversy was whether it was appropriate to produce robes made of silk rather than the traditional coarser cloth or even rags. The use of exquisite finery reflected the majestic aura of the Buddha, who was a kind of mystical monarch, especially since he had descended from a line of kings. The glorified vestments also highlighted strong political connections then held between prestigious Zen monasteries and the imperial court, which promoted the temples' prosperity and appointed the abbots who managed religious functions. Rag robes symbolized austerity and dedication.

Constant debate took place in regard to the sacred values and practical decorum embodied by different kinds of robes used in the monastic system. A related issue was whether a master should be allowed or expected to accept regalia that was designed with special material and colors produced by the court and donated or assigned to the cleric by secular authorities. Some Zen leaders were considered heroic precisely because they took a stand against government intrusion by

turning down the offer of the so-called purple robe that came from the emperor, since it could compromise their spiritual integrity and lofty ideals. While other priests wore this mantle proudly, Zen literature often praises the humility and meekness of "patch-robed monks." In some cases, the masters who turned down fancy robes suffered punishment, such as excommunication or exile to a remote southern province. These strict practitioners followed the asceticism of ancient abstainers, who pieced together their robes from discarded garments found near graveyards or by the roadside, no matter how wretched.

Another image—more conceptual than practical—that is critical for understanding the meaning of case 23 is the notion of the "original face," which is also referred to as the "look on your face before you were born." The idea behind this notion is that the Buddha-nature possessed by each and every being is characterized by pure bliss and compassion based on innate knowledge of the oneness of all phenomena. Being born, however, means that once a person comes into the world of endless division and differentiation, inevitably he or she will be corrupted by having to make ethical decisions that somehow always seem relative and arbitrary. The great challenge is to awaken and recover the primordial state that is not bound by distinctions between good and evil yet invariably exercises human willpower toward the advantage of what is righteous and true.

A famous poem by Japanese Zen master Dogen that was cited by the Japanese novelist Yasunari Kawabata at the beginning of his Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech in 1968 is entitled "Original Face." The poetic content goes on to describe the rotation of the four seasons in a way that recalls the verse comment to *Gateless Gate* case 19 as well as the Korean film on the seasons cited in Chapter 2. According to Dogen's Japanese poem, composed in the five-line, thirty-one-syllable *waka* style (a precursor to the three-line, seventeen-syllable haiku):

In spring, cherry blossoms,
In summer, the cuckoo's song,
In fall, the harvest moon,
In winter, the snow is frozen—
How wonderful the seasons are!

As a typical Zen paradox, the content of Dogen's verse, focusing entirely on the natural environment, deliberately avoids any direct reference to the psychological significance implied by its title.

Gateless Gate case 23, along with Wumen's comments, is cited here in full with each of its six subsections labeled to highlight which of the main narrative themes these passages illustrate:

"Thinking of neither Good nor Evil"

5. *Monasticism*	Sixth patriarch Huineng was chased by head monk Ming unto Dayu Peak. Seeing Ming approaching, the patriarch placed the robe and bowl on a rock and said, "This robe represents the faith. Can it really become the subject of a contest? Go ahead and take it away."
4. Mythology	Ming tried to pick up the robe, but it was as immovable as a mountain.
1. Doubt	Caught short by fear and trembling, Ming said, "I came in pursuit of the dharma, not to get the robe. I beg you, powerful master, to enlighten me with your instruction."
2. Experience	The sixth patriarch said, "Not thinking of good and not thinking of evil, at this very moment, what is the original face of head monk Ming?" Ming immediately attained a great enlightenment experience. His whole body was drenched with sweat.
3. Expression	Ming wept and bowed, saying, "Besides the secret words and secret meanings that were disclosed, is there any other, still deeper meaning?" The patriarch said, "What I have explained is not a secret teaching. When you illuminate your own original face, the inner meaning is manifest right here and now."
6. Succession	Ming said, "I practiced in the assembly under Huangmei for many years, but I was not able to realize my own original face. Now, upon receiving your instruction, I am like someone who drinks

> water and knows for himself whether it is cool or warm. Powerful master, you are my teacher." The patriarch said, "In that case, let us both say we have Huangmei as our teacher. Take care in preserving your attainment."

Wumen's prose comment: The sixth patriarch rose to the occasion to help out someone in his lineage by displaying the kindliness of a grandmother. It is as though he peels a fresh lychee, removes the seed, and places it in your mouth, so that all you need to do is swallow it whole.

Wumen's verse:

There is no description, and no picture.
There is nothing to admire, so stop trying to grasp it.
The original face is never concealed;
When the whole world collapses, it will remain unharmed.

Case 23 opens with an emphasis on monastic rules. In the name of enforcing these behavioral codes to preserve the system's hierarchy, the head monk is actually breaking decorum. By seeking to claim the robe as an external possession for himself or his group, driven by rank animosity toward Huineng, rather than seeing it as a manifestation of inner attainment, he reveals the egoism and greed that are the basis of his spiritual deficiencies. The sixth patriarch has no attachment and is therefore willing to sacrifice the symbols of transmission. He knows that self-reliance and self-assurance will prevail over enemies whose inauthenticity makes itself known at every turn in the story.

Huineng says that the robe represents "faith," which is a word commonly used in Zen to refer to interior awareness of the dharma, or Buddhist teachings. In early Buddhist writings, faith is understood as a matter of dedication by holding firm to the courage of one's conviction. While the term "dharma" may sound like an objective principle, faith conveys the subjective engagement when someone consciously sets aside everyday attitudes in order to make a leap toward embracing the emptiness of conceptual constructions so as to reach the field of transcendence.

The second subsection of the case, featuring mythology, indicates an abrupt comeuppance undergone by the head monk that has captivating magical overtones when the robe cannot be moved. This bit of fanciful storytelling may at first seem out of place in a Zen dialogue that should dispense with superstition. However, the supernatural element used here and in many other examples plays a vital role in the narrative by highlighting inward symbolism. Other signs of authority used by Zen masters include the walking staff, which was fashioned from the branch of a tree found during a period of meditation in the forest, and the ritual fly whisk, which represents purification and is held in the teacher's hand while preaching a sermon from the high seat in the temple's main hall. There are countless stories of the masters' staff or fly whisk flying around the room, turning into snakes, or having the power to beat wild foxes into submission.

Huineng convincingly demonstrates that the prized ceremonial garb is not meant for those who are unworthy in their heart of hearts. "Immovable" is a term frequently used in Zen writings to characterize an enlightened mind that does not waver because it has supreme confidence that is rooted in truth. More than a half dozen koans included in the *Gateless Gate,* especially case 29 involving Huineng's instruction to monks arguing about the relation between the wind blowing and a flag moving, puts an emphasis on the human mind as the basis for the unity of objective and subjective reality.

The power exhibited by the robe can also be compared to the biblical account of Joseph's "robe of many colors," which he received from his visionary father, Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons, and the others greatly resented Joseph, since they felt their birthright was that they deserved better treatment than their younger brother. One theory about the multiple colors is that the robe emanated a divine essence, but another view is that it was patched together from various random garments. According to the book of *Genesis*, Joseph's brothers conspired to sell him into slavery in Egypt while also spoiling the robe. But his ability to decipher the Pharaoh's dreams ultimately yielded him prestigious status while in exile. Joseph showed great compassion, which eventually restored unity to the family and abetted the survival of the ancient Israeli people. As with the Huineng

story, the robe serves as a flashpoint for intragroup conflict and resolution.

In the third subsection of case 23, conveying the crucial role played by doubt in the process of spiritual realization, Ming is startled by his own weakness in relation to the strength of the robe. He is overwhelmed by "fear and trembling," a phrase that recalls the title of one of the main philosophical works by nineteenth-century existentialist Søren Kierkegaard, who also penned *The Sickness unto Death* and *The Concept of Dread.* These three books, all pioneering accounts of the psychology of anxiety, helped put the word "angst," later used extensively by European thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger, into the English dictionary.

According to both Zen and Kierkegaard, one must endure a feeling of being shaken to the very core of one's being before a spiritual turnaround can begin to transpire. In another interesting biblical parallel, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* treats the story of Abraham, who is commanded by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The first monotheist then finds, paradoxically, that because he is willing to commit this act, God has substituted an animal at the last moment at the sacrificial altar that Abraham has prepared. Like Ming, Abraham all at once is startled and dismayed but also put into a state of awe that leads to a startling spiritual breakthrough.

At first, the head monk is reluctant to admit to his shortcomings. He tries to conceal his real intention by claiming that he seeks realization of the dharma instead of possession of the robe. However, Ming recognizes that there is much to be learned and adopts an attitude of humility and obeisance toward the sixth patriarch. The term of address he uses, "powerful master" (*xingzhe*), can have many meanings. At the most basic level, it refers to "one" (*zhe*) who "practices" (*xing*) as part of a religion. But it can also suggest an itinerant seeker who is outside the monastery system, since *xing* indicates walking or traveling. Or the term can imply an abbot's assistant, who is part of the temple establishment and works closely in preparing, recording, and editing the master's sermons, which generally include comments on dialogues. In addition, the compound term is often used to suggest one who demonstrates supernatural powers, as with Huineng's robe. The lead character of the famous Chinese Buddhist novel *Monkey*

(also known as *Journey to the West*) is referred to by this term. That level of meaning recalls Northern school conversion stories whereby a Zen teacher commands the supernatural in order to preach to spirits. But, in this instance, the power of preaching is directed toward rectifying the ignorance of a human follower.

The fourth subsection highlights the experience of personal transformation as Huineng creates a breakthrough moment by using a simple yet demanding inquiry to strip bare all illusions and enable a realization of the fundamental spiritual nature of Ming underlying his duplicity and deception. The term "original face" is a literal translation that seems more appropriate than alternatives like "inner spirit" or "true nature." This notion is more or less synonymous with the universal Buddha-nature, a crucial doctrine that was initiated in India but took hold as perhaps the single main component of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy in East Asia. Early Indian schools of Buddhism were ambivalent about the essence of human existence, which could lean toward suffering or toward enlightenment, depending on predilections and practices.

In China, however, Buddhism was greatly influenced by the doctrine of the Confucian philosopher Mencius, who argued that human nature is morally pure. For example, if anyone sees a child in distress, that person will rush to help, regardless of class, education, or other formative or conditioning factors. The notion of original face is a way of capturing that simple but all-important integration of Mahayana Buddhist and Confucian ideals. Ming's extreme doubt and embarrassment are compounded by the profundity of Huineng's unanswerable query. But he quickly realizes his true nature while perspiring profusely, one of the symptoms of the Zen illness that is now suddenly cured.

The fifth subsection of this case clarifies the kinds of expression that can be used to communicate the experience of enlightenment. Ming is still confused, at the third of four tries, because he presumes that Huineng has espoused a "secret" form of instruction. This term can also signify the style of esoteric Buddhism generally associated with Tibetan Tantra or the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism. The esoteric approach makes use of mantras, prayers, or other verbal as well as visual formulas that do not have a factual level of significance

but convey some kind of clandestine meaning that is totally unapparent from the actual words or images. Esotericism is generally contrasted with exoteric Buddhist teachings, for which literal meaning does count, as with two of countless examples, the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, which were preached by the Buddha. Zen seems to strive for a middle way between the esoteric and exoteric, as Huineng claims that there is a false distinction between the secret and unconcealed in that the all-pervasive truth is obscure yet universally apparent.

Following three orderly stages sketching Ming's process of attaining transformation—doubt characterized by fear and trembling, the sweat-drenched experience of enlightenment, and using an expression of awakening that is not limited to secret or esoteric words—the story concludes in the sixth subsection of the case. Here, the narrative returns and brings closure to the matter of succession, which was evoked in the first two passages. Huineng, whose ascendancy to the patriarchy is no longer threatened, turns down Ming's request that Huineng be considered the superior party. The flattery implied by this suggestion is perhaps yet another aspect of the head monk's inauthenticity, which continues to linger despite the various dramatic revulsions and reversals that have taken place. By insisting on deferring to Huangmei and preserving the conventional hierarchy in a way that does justice to an egalitarian yet multilayered brotherhood of monks, the renegade Huineng proves that he is fully capable of being the legitimate heir to the Zen throne. This is further demonstrated by his willingness to forgive and encompass his erstwhile enemies.

Then, Wumen's verse comments on transformation by highlighting the ineffable role of the original face, which exerts the real spiritual power beyond the immovability of the robe. One's true nature is "eternal," but this concept must be taken as a figurative expression for spiritual strength rather than an assertion about an endless quantity of time. The prose comment emphasizes the perpetuation of the Zen lineage through Huineng's "grandmotherly" or indulgent style of teaching, which peels and practically eats the fruit of knowledge for the unenlightened. Here, again, we find an example of tongue-in-

cheek rhetoric, since the sixth patriarch has caused Ming so much mental as well as physical anguish.

In addition to drawing on folklore through the mythology of a potent robe that changes the course of lives as well as the destiny of the Zen school, thus lending the case narrative a sense of epic proportions, we can also identify other cultural influences on the case. These include the art-of-war style of contest and competition between two monks and the schools of thought they represent; the way Huineng deals with the haughty attitude of his pursuer, as drawn from the legal model; and the spontaneous flash of insight Ming experiences, influenced by artistic disciplines. The full impact of the koan record relies on each of these factors but is greater than the sum of the parts.

The next two chapters of this book bring up several examples of cases selected from the *Gateless Gate* and other important collections published during the Song dynasty. These dialogues illustrate each of the six structural elements of koan records, which are reflective of the two main levels of transcendental illumination: personal transformation, by emphasizing individual experience, and monastic transmission, by highlighting community management in relation to Zen's behavioral codes.

This analysis is carried out in a way that recalls the traditional approach to interpretation, whereby Zen teachers would "raise" a case by examining each word or phrase from historical and conceptual perspectives. In the classic period, raising a case meant that a master invited a special group of disciples to an interactive sermon in his quarters, where he offered an interpretation true to the original source while also taking poetic license to refashion its significance in novel ways.

From a contemporary standpoint, this type of interpretative method is generally referred to as hermeneutics, an impartial yet engaged form of reading and explaining a text, whether of religious, literary, or cultural significance. The approach of hermeneutics is to take a median position between textual exegesis, which fully accepts the premises of a spiritual teaching in contrast with or defiance of historiographical studies, and skeptical criticism, which points out

inconsistencies but sometimes without appreciation for the original intent of the mystical expressions. The hermeneutics of interpreting koan cases is therefore at once neutral, or above the fray of sectarian discord in pursuit of universal truth, and engaged, by getting down in the weeds of the complexity and diversity of practical perspectives and making comments based on particular circumstances and views.

CHAPTER 4

Personal Transformation

Cases Reflecting Doubt, Experience, and Expression

Going to Extremes in Pursuit of Spiritual Freedom

Buddhism as a major world religious tradition and the Zen school in particular are often characterized as representing a middle path that navigates between extreme ideological stances. These standpoints cover philosophical principles, such as absolutism versus relativism and theism versus atheism, as well as psychological outlooks, including optimism as opposed to pessimism or passionate attachment as opposed to indifference. According to the basic Buddhist approach, any and all theoretical or emotional views, however reasonable they may seem, when taken to their logical conclusion, will invariably lead to a problematic position reflecting an underlying fixation or obsession. Stubborn adherence to an extreme view must be avoided and abandoned at all costs in order to shed delusion and pave the way for a realization of enlightenment.

For example, seeing all values as relative and qualified without preference or partiality may seem to constitute a positive objective approach, but if this ideological stance results in an inability to make distinctions or causes arbitrary decisions, it turns into a deficiency. In addition, love is a sentiment well respected for greatly benefiting other people, but if the feeling defaults to blind loyalty so as to protect a favored person at the expense of the group, then this virtue quickly becomes counterproductive. However, reversing course from endorsing one set of extreme views by moving to the other end of the spectrum in holding fast to the contradictory standpoints of monism

or indifference does not constitute a viable alternative. Instead, this swing only compounds the degree of incomprehension.

The need to adopt a middle path reached not by a weak sense of compromise but by not succumbing to either of two problematic options that can be considered extreme is articulated in the verse comment on *Gateless Gate* case 2. This koan deals with the perennial question of whether a Zen master who has reached the state of transcendence remains bound by or is free from the law of karmic causality. If freedom from cause and effect prevails, then the master can feel above the law and commit transgressions without consequence, but if bondage to causality is the unbreakable law of the universe, then what constitutes the certification of the Zen master's enlightenment? Wumen's poem says that whichever side of the debate is chosen is somewhat misguided:

> Bound by or free from causality—
> Two sides of the coin.
> Free from or bound by causality,
> A thousand errors and tens of thousands of mistakes!

Therefore, clinging to a potentially detrimental conceptual construct, no matter how logically necessary it may appear to be at first, in effect creates what is called "the tail of the buffalo." This bizarre image, suggested by *Gateless Gate* case 38, indicates that any lingering attachment to a potentially extreme viewpoint, even if it functions on a subconscious level, causes an insurmountable impasse. The obstacle prevents the animal from passing through a window although the larger portions of head, torso, and legs are pushed along. The symbolism suggests that the "telltale tail" removes the ignorant party from any chance of fully and finally overcoming the causes of suffering. According to Wumen's verse comment, "This tiny little tail, / What a strange thing it is!"

The main issue in Buddhist spirituality is achieving the transformation necessary for enlightenment. In most Buddhist schools, the assumption is that if one is born into the world as a human being, one is not yet enlightened and needs to follow specific practices in order to uproot desire and come to know things as they are. In Zen, by contrast, the presumption that became widespread was that people's

minds are inherently luminous, and so enlightenment is not so much a discovery or a change of nature as a recovery and reconciliation with the nature one possesses but does not fathom. This is not an attainment or a gain at all, but a realization of Buddha-nature in everyday life. In that sense, what makes Zen practice inherently a dilemma causing great doubt is the paradox of becoming what one already is, which is a difficult feat given acquired deficient habits. Koans are designed to facilitate pushing practitioners into the living dynamic of this dilemma in order to help catapult them to a standpoint that ultimately breaks through it.

Despite this emphasis on taking a middle path, attaining personal transformation as the entrée to the Zen field of transcendence through koan studies does require that the trainee undergo seemingly extreme experiences. These occur on a kind of roller coaster of contradictory outlooks and feelings that are necessarily extended to the outer limits during the course of realizing enlightenment. It takes a thief to catch a thief, as the saying goes, or a fox to know a fox in a case commentary, and in a koan exercise it can take extreme actions to overcome the extreme, much as a poison counteracts the effects of another poison.

The practitioner must first endure the angst of doubt to his or her utmost capacity, casting aside all assumptions in order to realize a spontaneous breakthrough to spiritual fulfillment, which occurs instantaneously, like a flash of lightning. Once realization is attained by overcoming doubt, the practitioner who has passed through that stage needs to be able to find the relevant form of expressing truth, which uses the least amount of verbiage possible in approaching silence so as to evoke the full significance of enlightenment beyond logic and language. Every step of the way finds that an extreme event or emotion is encountered. Legends of Bodhidharma's life and teaching highlight his willingness to take extreme actions whenever necessary. Bodhidharma also told the emperor to his face the notion that all his compassionate mundane activities, such as building pagodas or performing other kinds of good deeds, come to naught from the standpoint of the emptiness of all categories.

Bodhidharma (J. Daruma) is celebrated today in popular culture in Japan because he symbolizes total, unlimited dedication and

Daruma dolls. Photo by the author.

determination to prevail in all his endeavors. The quadriplegic image of the first patriarch has also become a good-luck charm distributed at countless temples and talisman stands throughout the country. According to local lore, one of the eyes on the charm is blackened when its owner is starting a new enterprise, whether a business venture or a political campaign. The belief is that when efforts have successfully reached completion, the other eye will be filled in automatically. Part of this idea is based on the widespread Buddhist view that the ceremony for "opening the eye" by painting the image on a statue symbolically brings a Buddha icon to life.

Perhaps "drastic measures" would be a better term to use to refer to intense Zen actions taken in pursuit of enlightenment, so as to avoid confusion with the term "extremism." Other examples of drastic kinds of behavior in Zen records can be found in the images of monks such as Huineng and Deshan ripping or burning sutras as well as Linji's famous injunction to "kill the Buddhas and patriarchs"

if they are met on the road. These methods are no doubt cited in koan collections in a way that is more rhetorical than actual. But in terms of actual training techniques, prolonged meditation sessions known as *sesshin* are still held in some temples today, requiring as much as twenty-one hours a day of contemplation, with the last three hours spent sleeping while sitting in the zazen posture. The supervising monk strikes those who doze off during meditation practice repeatedly with the staff. This instrument is made of light wood, but it can inflict considerable pain if frequently used.

There are also many examples of extreme behavior in practices endorsed by various other Buddhist schools that influenced Zen. Some ascetics wander, never sleeping in the same place two nights in a row, and collect filthy rags for their robes, and other severely austere monks may burn or cut off body parts or even commit self-immolation as a way of heightening and then suddenly terminating the anguish caused by living in the material world. Different kinds of fire-walking practices are a fairly common technique in Buddhist cults. The notion of resorting to physical violence as part of the process of intensive spiritual purification is especially evident in cases 3 and 41 of the *Gateless Gate,* in which a novice's finger and a disciple's arm are cut off, as well as in case 14, in which a cat is cut. These examples show how koan literature absorbs motifs from diverse Buddhist sources, even if these practices were probably not carried out as such in the Zen school.

What is the relation between an emphasis on following the middle path and the apparent necessity of enduring extremes or undertaking drastic measures in the pursuit of spiritual freedom? According to the prose commentary on the first case of the *Gateless Gate,* in which Zhaozhou answers "no" to the question of whether a dog has Buddha-nature, the sensation of doubt is total, like swallowing a red-hot iron ball, and the dedication needed to overcome it musters every single bone and pore in one's body:

> Arouse your entire body with its three hundred and sixty bones and joints and its eighty-four thousand pores of the skin; summon up a spirit of a ball of doubt and concentrate on this word "No." Carry it continuously day and night. Do not form a nihilistic

> conception of vacancy or a relative conception of "has" or "has not." It will be just as if you swallow a red-hot iron ball, which you cannot spit out even if you try. All the illusory ideas and delusive thoughts accumulated up to the present will be exterminated, and when the time comes, internal and external realms will be spontaneously united. You will know this, but for yourself only, like a mute person who awakens from a dream.

In this passage, the extreme feeling of doubt is directly linked to the practice of the middle path, since Zhaozhou's negative response should not be understood in terms of the idea that the dog either does or does not possess the spiritual quality of the Buddha-nature. The image of the mute person indicates that silence is the best way to communicate awakening. To highlight the irony of these comments in regard to how extremes are seen in relation to the middle path, let it be expressed this way: bypassing extreme views by not arguing about polarities while taking a middle path is part of an extreme experience of confronting the ball of doubt, which represents the only way out of a psychic morass caused by an attachment to extremes.

The relation between traveling the middle path through taking extreme actions or drastic measures can be further clarified by making a basic distinction in Zen philosophy between the "extreme," which is disdained for violating the middle path, and the "radical," or drastic, which is supported for delving into the deepest level or root conditions of a person's inner spirituality and relation to external reality. The approach of koan literature and practice is to evade and avoid any extreme position that has inevitable shortcomings. Instead, learning with cases undertakes a radical approach to spiritual recovery in the sense of digging out from the core of one's being the fundamental causal factors of deep-seated ignorance. This is a necessary stage in realizing a thoroughgoing and far-reaching interior renovation of character and disclosure of one's true nature, or original face. Radical spiritual recovery maintains a focus on navigating a middle path that eludes oppositional alternatives in favor of reviving one's innermost existential foundations.

Each of the stages of the path of transformation—beginning with doubt at the outset of the quest in order to experience a turnabout of

mentality and ending with expression as a means of disclosure—engages a deliberately drastic measure or radical step toward reaching enlightenment that is fully aligned with taking the middle path between extreme views. These stages are examined in the next three sections of this chapter by explanations of key examples of koan records illustrating their respective functions.

The appendix contains a full list of the forty-eight cases in the *Gateless Gate,* with eight cases each organized according to six narrative structural elements, including three koans cited for the process of transformation and another three cited for transmission. When linked together, these cases tell a unified and integrated story about achieving personal resolution in order to overcome spiritual uncertainty through gaining a radical reversal and revolution of the inner spirit. This further facilitates the management of temple order and the transmission of the torch to a successful disciple.

Distress of Doubt: Angst and Alienation

In Zen Buddhist training with koans, undergoing a profound state of doubt is the very first essential step of the entire process of mystical awakening and selection of a successor. This sensation causes the bodily symptoms of Zen illness, resembling a somatic malady or mental breakdown, as with Ming's intense perspiration when confronted with Huineng's immovable robe in *Gateless Gate* case 23. Doubt must be encountered forthrightly and then controlled in a thoroughgoing fashion so as to surpass instability and eventually gain enlightenment.

Generally in life we seek stability and assurances through external confirmations, such as financial security or societal status, but from a metaphysical standpoint these are mere props that could be taken away or dissolved at any time. Outside circumstances that are relied upon will invariably implode or explode. The stock market may crash, the housing bubble can burst, a personal or family crisis may ensue, or some man-made or natural disaster may threaten to manifest at a moment's notice. The experiences of September 11, 2001, in the United States, resulting from terrorism, and of March 11, 2011, in Japan, caused by the triple threat of the earthquake-tsunami-meltdown, have recently shown this contingency all too clearly.

Indeed, we face the possibility of loss or lack at every turn, whether this is caused by emotional turmoil due to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" or through facing illness or anticipating death among family or close friends. These experiences, which can be fleeting or protracted, undermine presuppositions about life's conditions and eliminate any sense of false certainty and pride. As upsetting as that may seem, the silver lining is that being shaken to the core opens the door to a possible spiritual breakthrough. Rather than condemning and resisting awareness of potential pitfalls, the Zen trainee must embrace and work through them with conviction.

If a prospective practitioner is not aware of feeling doubt at the core of his or her being, this is considered the result not of authentic confidence but of an obstinate narrow-mindedness based on egoism. Some people are incorrigible learners and make no progress because they refuse to encounter anxiety and alienation even if it surrounds and permeates every situation. They may feel safe and secure in a bubble, but this will invariably be short-lived. For such a trainee to begin to make progress on the spiritual pathway, he or she must quickly endure a sense of profound instability and uncertainty. This can take place through an easier route of consciously learning enough about selfhood and reality to understand that the ephemeral quality of life causing one to be perplexed about the meaning of human existence is a crucial stepping-stone in the pursuit of truth.

Or, if one earnestly seeks an awakening yet still clings to safety and avoids taking on doubt wholeheartedly, one must undergo a tougher route of having to be shocked into the unconscious sensation through the master's selected method of abrupt and dramatic teaching. Should one already be engaged with doubt but the sensation is not taken to a drastic level, the feeling of anxiety will manifest in physical or mental symptoms, ranging from a persistent pain to an unsettling dream, which are obstacles that can be transmuted into a vehicle for gaining self-awareness. In that event, angst needs to be heightened through drastic teaching measures and brought to a head, like a festering infected boil waiting to be lanced or a mental disturbance urgently in need of therapeutic treatment. Several koan cases are specifically designed to accomplish that goal in order to lead to a radical turnabout and complete transformation.

An American pop song from the famous 1950s Broadway show *Damn Yankees,* "Heart," shows how the long-suffering fans of a pathetic, losing baseball team encourage their players. This song prods an underdog group to play ball beyond its ability based on the power of positive thinking. While that feeling may be relevant for a later stage of koan training, a Zen version of the song for the initiation of the path to awakening would likely be, "You gotta have doubt." This feeling stimulates those who are full of themselves to come down from their high perches and face instability front and center. Following the hit song's model, the Zen lyric might go, "All you really need is doubt, / When the ego's sayin' you got it for sure / That's when you should start to pout." Therefore, one must confront angst as the first phase of transformation. After this matter has been delved into and resolved, then summoning heart or faith is operative in the next developmental stage.

There are a number of concepts in modern Western thought that highlight attitudes similar to Zen doubt. Noting this briefly helps explain why koan literature has such an impact in today's society. One example previously mentioned identifies angst as an acute but nonspecific free-floating sense of distress, a notion introduced into English usage from existentialist philosophy in the mid-1800s. Søren Kierkegaard's works, such as *The Sickness unto Death,* analyzed different degrees of dread and despair in regard to the complex relation of self and world. Angst results from the gap created between the finite and infinite aspects of human existence. In addition, social philosophers such as Karl Marx and Ludwig Feuerbach examined how alienation is fostered when one fails to separate oneself from the "crowd" or "herd mentality" and is tormented internally by the rift between genuine intentions and false actions.

These thinkers, along with twentieth-century giants like Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, have criticized the inauthenticity of bad faith or false consciousness. This results when an individual thinks or acts as expected due to societal pressures to conform, thus relinquishing integrity and inner resolve. Furthermore, Western psychology has explained the significance of double-bind situations that represent an emotionally distressing dilemma caused by conflicting messages and contradictory impulses

in that you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. The notions of angst and alienation form a psychic nexus regarding the sense of "high anxiety"—to evoke the title of a famous Mel Brooks film spoofing some of these themes—and that is precisely what many koans seek to create in ironic and irreverent fashion.

According to a letter written to a lay follower by Song dynasty koan master Dahui, since the feeling of doubt is the crucial transitional turning point in spiritual transformation, it is necessary to seize whatever one is deeply involved with at the moment, no matter how petty or mundane, and create an occasion for generating angst. The demands that Dahui makes about defining a bamboo comb are an example of forcing the trainee to undergo a drastic double-bind experience at this very moment:

> If you call this a bamboo comb, you are wrong. If you don't call this a bamboo comb, you are also wrong. Don't say anything, but also don't remain silent. You must not think; you must not guess. You are not allowed to get up and leave the room. Nothing you do is appropriate. If you want to grab the bamboo comb, go ahead and grab it. I will then use my fist and demand that you express yourself. If you want me to put my fist down, that is all right, too. But then I will ask you to make a statement about the whole world. You won't be able to escape from that!

Dahui goes on to depict the role of the koan instructor, who does whatever it takes to make the disciple realize doubt, by means of an analogy with the stop-at-nothing tactics of a ruthless public official:

> Once a monk compared me to an official who asked for more things after he had confiscated someone's entire property. I like this comparison very much. Indeed I want you to hand over everything. When you have nowhere to go, you will simply have to die. Throwing yourself into the river or jumping into fire, you will die when you are ready to die. Only after you have truly died will you gradually come to life again.

Several koan records are particularly notable for conveying in just a few lines a full narrative arc of dread leading to total desperation. This is based on an intolerable command to perform some drastic ac-

tion issued by a master, who will not tolerate indecision or a misguided choice. This dire situation has the prospect of ending in regret and shame without an escape route. There is "no exit," to cite the title of one of Sartre's plays. The following examples start with a couple of cases emphasizing physical imagery, such as hanging from a tree or standing on a pole. The cases cited become increasingly abstract in how they evoke the sensation of doubt.

Gateless Gate case 5, "Xiangyan's 'Up in a Tree,'" conveys a situation of limitless exasperation and futility resembling what Kierkegaard referred to as the condition of fear and trembling. According to the koan record:

> Master Xiangyan said, "It is like a man up in a tree hanging from a branch by only his mouth; his hands do not grasp a bough, and his feet do not rest on a limb. Someone appears under the tree and asks, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?" If there is no answer, he fails to respond to the question. If there is an answer, he will lose his life. In such a situation, what would you do?"

In considering the explicit imagery of imminent bodily harm evoked here, it is interesting to note that a repentance ritual practiced in an ancient Japanese Buddhist cult known as Yamabushi (or Shugendo) requires the trainee to be hung upside down from the edge of a cliff for hours or more, with one foot being held by a colleague, until he is ready to be rescued. That, indeed, is a drastic measure used to attain freedom.

The symbolism of this case can also be compared to a line from *The Magnificent Seven,* a late 1950s Hollywood remake of *The Seven Samurai* by the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. The main character, played by actor Steve McQueen, who leads a group of cowboys selflessly coming to the aid of a Mexican village that is constantly under threat of attack by merciless bandits, speaks calmly yet ironically of the need for an acceptance of doubt: "A man falls from a ten-story building. As he passes each floor on the way down, he says to himself, 'So far, so good.'" Of course, the cowboys, like Kurosawa's samurai, prevail in the end because of their values of diligence and dedication to a cause, although four members of the group die in battle. In another expression of the intense feeling of all-pervasive

existential doubt, according to a Bob Dylan blues lyric in the song "Mississippi," "Well my ship's been split to splinters and it's sinkin' fast / I'm drownin' in the poison, got no future, got no past."

Wumen's prose comments highlight the context of angst suggested by the case: "Even if your eloquence flows like a river, it is of no avail. Though you can expound the whole treasury of Buddhist literature, it is of no use." However, Wumen also argues that the perilous situation represents the key to a spiritual turnabout: "If you solve this problem, you will give life to the way that has been dead until this moment and destroy the way that has been alive up till now. Otherwise, you must wait for Maitreya Buddha and beg him for help." According to Wumen's sardonic verse remark about the master's teaching style: "Xiangyan is truly thoughtless; / His vice and poison are endless."

Gateless Gate case 46, "Leaping from atop a Pole," provides another palpable image of the radical nature of Zen doubt: "Master Shishuang asked, 'How do you step forth from the top of a hundred-foot pole?' Another venerable teacher of old said, 'You, sitting atop a hundred-foot pole, although you have entered the Way, you are not yet genuine. Leap from the top of the pole, and you will show your whole body in the ten directions.' "

In other words, just when you think you have reached a peak, you realize that you must start the journey anew and master an even more challenging task. What goes up must come down and vice versa. This recalls the menacing Van Halen rock lyric, "You might as well jump! Jump!" However, Wumen's verse comment suggests that even this drastic measure may still not be enough: "Even though he may sacrifice his life, / He is only a blind man leading the blind."

While these cases feature corporal symbolism, the absurd image of the buffalo's tail stranded at the windowpane straddles the physical and symbolic realms. Continuing with an emphasis on the psychological torment of doubt, in *Gateless Gate* case 44, "Bajiao's Staff," the master told his disciples, "If you have a staff, I will give you a staff. If you have no staff, I will take it from you." Noting the incomparable value of the Zen walking staff that "helps me wade across a river when the bridge is down and guide me to the village on a moonless night," Wumen's comment adds, "If you call it a staff, you will enter hell like an arrow."

Another example highlighting the inner symbolism of doubt is *Gateless Gate* case 47, "Doushuai's 'Three Barriers,'" which are set up for his disciples to conquer in sequence:

1. You leave no stone unturned in exploring profundity in order to see into your true nature. Now, I want to ask you just at this moment, where is your true nature?
2. If you realize your true nature, you are free from life and death. Tell me, when your eyesight fails at the last moment, how can you be free from life and death?
3. When you set yourself free from life and death, you should know your ultimate destination. So, when the four elements dissolve, where will you go?

According to this koan, no understanding is sufficient and a trainee can never tread water, so to speak, as there is always more to accomplish and yet another level of delusion to be removed. As Wumen's comment indicates, "If you have not resolved the matter yet, then gulping down your meal may fill you up but only chewing it thoroughly can sustain you." However, he also points in a positive direction: "If you can put turning words to these three questions, you are the master, wherever you may stand, who commands Zen, whatever circumstances you may be in." The verse remark cleverly continues:

This moment's thoughts see through eternal time;
Eternal time is just this moment.
If you see through this moment's thoughts,
You see through the one who sees through this moment.

Experience: Ungraspable Mind and Meditation

What does it take to resolve doubt so that you can command Zen in every situation no matter what the challenges are? In the final analysis, the basis of all spiritual possibilities, whether they tend toward ignorance or enlightenment, is the mind. Doubt originates and ends through mental capacity, even when the experience is depicted in graphic physical terms, such as hanging from a tree or standing atop a pole. "There are no dharmas [things/phenomena] outside of mind," is a common Zen saying. But what constitutes the mind and determines

the extent of its conceptual range? In Buddhist philosophy, the notion of mind resembles modern psychological theory to some extent (there is a view that Freud's notion of the unconscious may have been indirectly influenced by Buddhist teachings), but it also conveys other layers of meaning. Mind is at once individualistic, in covering various levels of personal conscious and subconscious awareness, including sublime meditative states, and universalistic, by encompassing all human and natural as well as sentient and insentient beings. As influenced by Chinese pantheistic thought emphasizing the innate ability of humanity to do good, as well as the divine qualities of nature, the notion of mind in the Zen school comes to be more or less synonymous with the principle of the oneness of Buddha-nature as a comprehensive spiritual principle.

Therefore, the goal of the second stage in the process of transformation gained through studying koan cases is to be sure that, once drastically disturbed by profound doubt, the mind suddenly yet ultimately reverses and renovates its course through an awareness of its role in the oneness of all things. This is accomplished through a new level of consciousness that attains a calm and resolute realization at once engaged with and detached from worldly activities. Such a breakthrough comes from the remarkable flash of insight that the mind is not an object to be grasped, literally or figuratively.

The functions of the brain as a body part can be examined, and the notion of interior perception evaluated, but ultimately mind in Zen is just another concept or a mental construction that is empty and void of form in the final analysis. Therefore, the term "no-mind" is often used to avoid an attachment to a fixed notion of "mind" and what it is supposed to represent, but this level of negation must not become another extreme view based on metaphysical nothingness or nihilism.

In koan studies, this phase in the process of entering the field of transcendence is initiated by demonstrating that mind lies at the root of all distinctions and judgments about the outside world. Mind thus needs to be modified through a radical reassessment and adjustment of inner motivations and attitudes in accord with universal spiritual awareness. The main koan that accomplishes this preliminary goal of the construction of mind—before the notion is decon-

structed by other case records—is *Gateless Gate* case 29, which deals with sixth patriarch Huineng's saying, "Not the Wind, Not the Flag":

> A temple flag was flapping in the wind, and two monks started an argument. One said the flag was moving, and the other said the wind was moving. They argued back and forth but could not reach a conclusion. The sixth patriarch approached and said, "It is not the wind that moves, nor is it the flag that moves. It is your minds that are moving." The two monks were awe-struck.

Wumen's comment acknowledges that the monks, who attained a sense of awe akin to Ming's dreadful experience based on the power of the robe, greatly benefited from Huineng's ingenious intrusion into their debate: "If you come to understand this matter deeply, you will see that the two monks paid for iron and got gold." However, in typical ironic fashion Wumen also lampoons this effort by charging that "the sixth patriarch could not help himself in helping them out, but he almost went too far." As with numerous other examples of koan comments, Wumen expresses concern when a master's teaching is overly indulgent and practically peels open and eats the fruit for the trainee.

Once it is established that mind is the basis for spiritual decision making, the next delusion that needs to be cut away and cast aside is the notion that mind constitutes an ultimate reality somehow providing all the answers. In various koan records, mind is at once constructed as the ground of reality and deconstructed (through the notion of no-mind) as just one more concept to be tossed aside. In the *Gateless Gate* collection, this paradoxical pattern is carried out twice. Two cases attributed to Mazu (30 and 33) and two cases by Nanquan (19 and 27), one of Mazu's main disciples and the mentor of Zhaozhou, deal with the paradox by featuring a simple yet crucial philosophical reversal. Taken together, the two cases for each master create a conundrum in that one koan asserts the unity of everyday mind and Buddha, or supports the notion that ordinary mentality is equal to the spiritual way, while the other case does just the opposite by denying this assertion.

In case 30, "This Very Mind Itself Is Buddha," master Mazu used this bold declaration in responding to a novice's simple question,

"What is Buddha?" According to Wumen's comment about the usefulness of the reply, "If you directly grasp Mazu's meaning, you wear the Buddha's clothes, eat the Buddha's food, speak the Buddha's words, do the Buddha's deeds—that is, you yourself are a Buddha." However, even within these brief remarks, Wumen reverses his position by charging, "Mazu misled many people into mistaking the mark on the balance for the weight itself. Why doesn't he realize that even mentioning the word 'Buddha' should make us rinse out our mouths for three days? If a man of understanding hears anyone say, 'This very mind itself is the Buddha,' he will cover his ears and rush away."

The contradiction is taken further in case 33, "This Mind Is Not Buddha," in which Mazu used this phrase in response to the same basic query, "What is Buddha?" Wumen comments, "If you understand this, you have finished studying Zen." His verse remark shows that whatever the assertion or denial may express, any particular teaching is provisional and therefore partial, so that it can be either supported or dismissed depending on what it takes to keep the baby from crying, according to a Mazu saying:

> Present a sword only when you meet a swordsman on the road;
> Do not compose a poem until you encounter a poet.
> When explaining to someone, provide only one-third of the reason;
> Do not give the whole story away all at once!

This pattern of simultaneous assertion-denial is also carried out in a couple of cases attributed to Nanquan. In koan discourse, knowing when it is appropriate to build up a doctrine and when it is appropriate to tear it down is the single most important ability a Zen master demonstrates. This means the teacher is constantly dealing with risky maneuvers, so performing the task of instruction in a misguided or shortsighted way becomes a deadly pedagogical deficiency.

The next step in the process of transformation is demonstrated by two main examples of koans that revolve around an all-important wordplay about the ungraspable quality of mind. One involves Bodhidharma and Huike, and the other involves Deshan and an old woman selling rice cakes on the roadside. In both instances, comprehending

a subtle verbal sleight of hand regarding mind constitutes the radical turnabout moment that is precisely what is needed to attain a spiritual breakthrough. The first instance is *Gateless Gate* case 41, "Bodhidharma Pacifies the Mind," which highlights that Huike's sudden insight came not from the shocking physical act of severing his arm but rather from an understanding that followed this drastic action triggered by the first patriarch's ingenious verbal comment on the nature of mind:

> Bodhidharma sat facing the wall of his cave. The second patriarch stood in the snow. He cut off his arm and presented it to Bodhidharma but cried out, "My mind is not yet at peace! I beg you, master, to bring me peace of mind!" "Bring your mind here and I will pacify it for you," replied Bodhidharma. "I have searched for my mind, but it is ungraspable," said the second patriarch. "Now your mind is pacified," said Bodhidharma.

The symbolism of the snow representing Huike's profound doubt, which triggers an act of self-mutilation, forms a necessary backdrop for understanding the wordplay that ultimately liberates the second patriarch. The pilgrim Huike, whose given name was Shanguang, was an itinerant practitioner longing for guidance in meditation. He is said to have heard of Bodhidharma's reputation for "wall-gazing" contemplation from a spirit that recommended he go and find the master in his cave.

In another version of this story, Huike's head began to ache one day as if it had been cut in half, and a miraculous voice told him that his bones were changing and re-forming, so that his face looked as if five mountain peaks had risen upon it. His teacher at the time interpreted this as an omen that Huike must travel to seek out Bodhidharma, who was then located at Shaolin Temple. Huike approached Bodhidharma in the dead of winter—the snowfall provides a natural signature for his psychic trials and tribulations—and stood unmoving for days while the first patriarch ignored his presence. Then Huike cut himself—in some versions, he severed his hand and the blood trickled a thin line of red onto the virgin snow. Bodhidharma's attitude of indifference heightened Huike's anguish and frustration so that he was ripe for the message that mind is not a literal object to be

grasped. It is therefore, fundamentally, neither peaceful nor restless, and neither serene nor disturbed, but empty of objectivity yet eminently dynamic and flexible.

Wumen's ironic verse remark playfully debunks the first patriarch's brilliant verbal maneuver:

> Coming from the west, directly pointing—
> All the current turmoil springs from this;
> The clamor now heard throughout the Zen monasteries
> Is entirely because of what you have done.

According to this poem, the uproar is the sound of monks learning by debating koan cases and frequently misunderstanding them while trying to correct their views.

A follow-up case that appears in some of the transmission of the lamp records, "Huike Absolves Sin," expands the function of the transformative wordplay:

> A layman approached second patriarch Huike and said, "I would like to become your disciple, but I am very ill. Please absolve me of my sin." Huike said, "Bring me your sin, and I will absolve you of it." After a while the lay devotee said, "I have looked for my sin, but it is ungraspable." Huike said, "There, I have absolved you of your sin. You must now take refuge in the Three Jewels [Buddha, dharma, and samgha]."

This koan dealing with the transition in early Zen to the third patriarch, named Sengcan, is patterned after the preceding case on selecting the second patriarch. However, the main theme shifts from putting a mind at rest in order to attain liberation to the matter of repenting for sins in order to attain healing from illness. The phrase "absolve me of my sin" could also be translated as "repent my sin for me," even though repentance in Buddhism is supposed to be entirely the responsibility of the practitioner. Having learned his lesson well from his master, Huike is now able to apply the teaching about the ungraspable quality of abstract categories like mind or sin. Both concepts may seem like objectifiable entities, but they are fundamentally intangible and empty of own-being.

According to the narrative's background, Huike was searching for the right person to become the third patriarch when a layman more than forty years old suddenly arrived. He did not announce his name but behaved with perfect etiquette and asked for healing through redemption from sin. The remedy starts by identifying the source of physical illness as something spiritual. In the koan, the disease could be relatively simple, like rheumatism, but another version says that the malady plaguing the third patriarch at the time of his first meeting with Huike was as severe as leprosy. This implies that a miraculous cure through faith healing must have taken place. After this incident, Sengcan said that for the first time he understood that the nature of sin lies neither inside nor outside human existence, nor in some imagined realm between the two.

This case resonates with the teaching of "formless repentance" attributed to Huineng in the *Platform Sutra*. The sixth patriarch's approach suggests that no specific transgression or misdeed needs to be recounted or regretted because all transgressions are fundamentally empty. In terms of healing, an affliction is not attributed to a specific cause or wrongdoing. Nor is the third patriarch required to disclose all of his flaws. Rather, he learns about the fundamental nature of sin from a confessor, who is able to expiate transgressions and effect a cure for the penitent. Although the content of this teaching is the Zen notion that the body-mind dichotomy is illusory because mind and reality are empty conceptual constructs, the process of instruction and cure may have been influenced by Daoist healing rites realized through shamanistic trance and exorcism in addition to Buddhist ceremonial confession.

After transmitting the robe as the main symbol of the dharma, Huike instructed the third patriarch, "Having received my teaching, you should live in the depths of the mountain and not go on a journey, for a calamity may soon take place in this country." This prediction stated that although the matter of the third patriarch's understanding was blessed, its form or the social conditions surrounding it were unfortunate. Huike's injunction provided an impetus to maintain Zen primarily as a monastic movement in the mountains rather than in an urban and thus easily secularized environment. It

may have also foreshadowed subsequent periods of the suppression of Buddhism that took place during the Tang dynasty. Following the transmission, however, it is said that Huike went into drinking shops or entered the premises of butchers, sometimes sharing in town gossip or engaging in manual work. When asked whether there was an ethical inconsistency regarding meditative reclusion in relation to everyday activity, he replied, "I am attuning my mind in accord with various social environments. But, after all, what business is it of yours?"

Another koan that uses the same wordplay about the ungraspable nature of mind is "Deshan and the Woman Selling Rice Cakes," which appears in many collections, including the prose comments on case 4 of the *Blue Cliff Record.* Deshan is also featured prominently in two *Gateless Gate* records: case 28, which takes place at the time of his enlightenment experience under master Longtan, and case 13, which occurs some years after he has become a temple abbot. Deshan was known to be "king of the *Diamond Sutra*" for carrying in his sack copious notes interpreting the Mahayana Buddhist scripture before Longtan demonstrated that these were entirely useless. Then Deshan brought his notes on the sutra to the front of the hall. Placing them next to a torch, he said to himself, "Even though you have exhausted the abstruse doctrines, it is like placing a hair in a vast space. Even though you have learned all the secrets of the world, it is like a drop of water dripped on the great ocean," and he burned all his writings.

The case of Deshan and the old woman revolves around an additional crucial wordplay concerning the term "rice cakes," or "refreshments," which are referred to in many Chinese restaurants today as "dim sum" (based on Cantonese rather than Mandarin pronunciation, which is *dianxin*). The term for these delicacies literally means, "pointing to" (*dian*/*dim*) the "mind" (*xin*/*sum*). According to the koan record:

> Deshan was traveling to the south in search of the dharma when he came across a woman on the roadside selling refreshments and asked, "Who are you?" She responded, "I am an old woman selling rice cakes." He said, "I'll take some of your rice cakes."

She said, "Venerable priest, why do you want them?" He said, "I am hungry and need some refreshments." She said, "Venerable priest, what are you carrying in your bag?" He said, "Haven't you heard I am 'king of the *Diamond Sutra*'? I have thoroughly penetrated all of its levels of meaning. Here I have my notes and commentaries on the scripture."

Hearing this, the old woman said, "I have one question. Venerable priest, may I ask it?" He said, "Go ahead and ask it." She stated, "I have heard it said that according to the *Diamond Sutra,* past mind is ungraspable, present mind is ungraspable, and future mind is ungraspable. So, where is the 'mind' [*xin*] that you wish to 'refresh' [*dian*] with rice cakes [*dianxin*]? Venerable priest, if you can answer, I will sell you a rice cake. But if you cannot answer, I will not sell you any rice cake." Deshan was struck speechless, and the old woman got up abruptly and left without selling him a single rice cake.

This koan recalls *Gateless Gate* case 31, which involves Zhaozhou learning from a roadside granny on the route to Mount Wutai. Both are examples of an elderly laywoman who makes no claim to Zen transmission or lineal authority yet is apparently able to outsmart a leading patriarch. As a result of the dialogue, the woman defeats Deshan at his own game, which is the study of the seminal doctrine of emptiness. However, one of the main commentaries calls into question the adequacy of her treatment of Deshan, but without giving him too much credit, either. It says that the parties should have carried out their exchange further until a good resolution was reached.

Deshan boasted of having written twelve volumes of commentary and of being an unsurpassed lecturer on the methods of scholastic Buddhism. He began his practice in the north, and it took him many years of wandering until he attained enlightenment in the south. Hearing about the direct style of the Southern school's teaching of sudden enlightenment, he traveled to the district below the Yangzi River, where Mazu's lineage was active, while carrying his collected writings on the sutra, which epitomized the style of the Northern school. The narrative in this case occurred shortly before he found his mentor and achieved a breakthrough under Longtan.

The old woman selling refreshments makes an ingenious philosophical pun that leaves Deshan stunned speechless at the conclusion of the exchange. She seems to be the clear and incontestable winner in a way that is far less ambiguous than in numerous other cases. However, the commentary by Dogen, who devotes an entire chapter to this koan in the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* tries to reverse the conventional understanding by criticizing the woman as well as Deshan. Dogen challenges Deshan for not asking in response to her query, "I cannot answer your question; what would you say?" Such a retort might have called the old woman's bluff.

Dogen further suggests that the old woman should have said, "Venerable priest, if you cannot answer my question, try asking me a question to see if I can answer you." This would have illustrated a great sense of self-confidence. Dogen is critical of both partners in the dialogue and does not want the old woman's wordplay to stand on its laurels by automatically receiving uncritical praise. A major implication of his interpretative approach is that the reader is left with the inconclusive feeling that there are no right answers and that anything said can be criticized. At the same time, there are no wrong answers. Is there any form of expression that can be adequately used to convey the significance of the experience of enlightenment?

Concise Expression: Language and Literature

Once one is awakened through a combination of words and no-words used in dialogues demanding that one read between the lines, the next challenge is to be able to adopt an authentic approach to balancing speech and silence in communicating the meaning of enlightenment. The double bind that caused anxiety and blockage in the first place does not dissolve fully once the ball of doubt has been resolved. Instead, it is transmuted from being a demand made upon an unenlightened practitioner to a command that as an attained master the individual must now be able to deliver unto others. Many koan records revolve around the drastic situation in which any form of speaking is misguided but not speaking anything at all is unacceptable, so what is to be done?

It is often said that society's VIPs, such as politicians and celebrities, talk a great deal to gain attention but reveal very little. Doing so

may be of practical benefit in the modern world, where each and every word is examined and parsed by media observers looking for flaws to be exposed. Public orators are cautioned against saying the wrong thing at the wrong time and place, since this can have a devastating effect by cutting short reputation and production. After all, actions speak louder than words and seeing is believing, if you want to go beyond a shadow of a doubt. However, saying little fails to disclose truth, and, therefore, uttering nothing at all in the end is not a viable option for genuine communication.

These situations recall those of a Zen master who does not want to give away too much to the disciple or reader. When to turn on the faucet of eloquent rhetoric for the sake of disclosure and when to turn this valve off in order to preserve minimalism and place the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of the practitioner is a crucial skill that takes a lot of practice to perfect. Deliberate, controlled vacillation from one extreme to the other based on meeting a follower's pedagogical needs, rather than trumpeting one's own abilities and accomplishments, is the great proficiency and prerogative of an accomplished Zen master.

Therefore, the aim of a koan is to use as few words as possible to convey the greatest sense of significance that will be grasped by those wise enough to get the point. This will lead to a productive sense of perplexity for followers who require additional intrigue to stimulate constructive philosophical probing. To achieve the goal of cryptic yet revelatory verbal discourse, a few choice words or phrases that are concise but powerful and compelling are evoked to carry out the task. A couple of the main examples of this in the *Gateless Gate* are "three pounds of flax" in case 12 and "no" in case 1. We have seen that these obscure or cryptic words or phrases are used by masters in replying to overly open-ended questions about Buddha and Buddha-nature. What is the sense of authority operating behind the uses of sparse words? To what extent does another school of interpretation regarding the role of language used in Zen koans consider it necessary to continually expand upon and enhance rather than stay limited to these minimalist forms of expression?

Gateless Gate case 8, "Xizhong, a Wheelmaker," highlights one of the main reasons why words fail to capture the essence of reality by

providing a simple metaphysical puzzle about breaking down a physical object to its component parts, which are empty of essence: "A master said, 'Xizhong, the first wheelmaker, made a cart whose wheels had a hundred spokes. Now, suppose you took a cart and removed both the wheels and the axle. What would you have?'" This case recalls a prominent Daoist passage indicating that, although we learn more about a window or a cup from the empty space than the material surroundings or container, the emptiness cannot be expressed in words. Similarly, modern Western philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has said, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Wumen's comment suggests, "If anyone can directly master this topic, his eye will be like a shooting star and his activity like a flash of lightning." However, the implication is that this task is nearly impossible to accomplish.

Since the koan about the wheelmaker may lead to an overestimation of and attachment to the role of silence, other cases seek to turn around that possible fixation by highlighting its inevitable limitations. For example, *Gateless Gate* case 39, "Yunmen's 'Gaffe in Speaking,'" points out that language, even when used in a flawed or repetitive way, is a necessary tool for expressing enlightenment:

> A monk said to Yunmen, "The brilliance of the Buddha silently illuminates the whole universe . . ." But before he could finish the verse, Yunmen said, "Aren't those the words of Zhangzhuo, the Accomplished One?" "Yes, they are," answered the monk. "You have slipped up in your speaking," Yunmen said. Afterward, another master brought up the matter and said, "Tell me at what point did the monk err in his speaking?"

Zhangzhuo, as referred to in this record, was a learned Tang dynasty scholar who excelled at the entrance examinations. "Accomplished One" was the designation for the select few who reached high on the ladder of meritocracy. He then became interested in Zen and was enlightened when a master pointed out that the character for the name Zhang literally signifies "unskilled." Rather than an insult, the meaning of the master's instruction was to show that awakening is beyond the distinction between merit and its lack within the realm of ordinary human affairs. The comment cited by the monk about

the Buddha's illumination was taken from Zhangzhuo's enlightenment verse, but Yunmen recognized that this was nothing more than a bit of rote learning. The overall impact of the koan is to show that invariably, in one way or another, words must be used. The more eloquent and original, the better, so that an expression of awakening should not lead to a bland mouthing of what others have innovatively articulated before.

Gateless Gate case 18, "Dongshan's 'Three Pounds of Flax,'" a phrase given in reply to a question about the status of Buddha, also appears as case 12 in the *Blue Cliff Record*. It evokes one of the most important examples of the meaningful use of non sequitur among the ample supply of such mysterious records in the canon of koan literature. Case 39 of the *Blue Cliff Record* is a similar example in that Yunmen answers, "The flowering field," to a monk's question. Master Dongshan Shouchu, referred to in case 12, is also featured in *Gateless Gate* case 15, but he is not to be confused with another famous master, Dongshan Liangjie, who was one of the founders of the Caodong/Soto school. Dongshan Shouchu, a disciple of Yunmen, was known primarily for making a basic distinction cited by the compiler of the *Blue Cliff Record,* among others, between the use of "live words," which are extraordinarily powerful and transformative for their ability to trigger enlightenment, and "dead words," which are debilitating and deficient for their commonplace manner of expression.

Wumen's verse gives high praise to Dongshan's response for the way it liberates one from the vicious cycles of endless unproductive doubt:

> "Three pounds of flax" came sweeping along;
> The words rang true, but even truer was the meaning.
> Those who argue about right and wrong
> Are enslaved by right and wrong.

However, his prose commentary characteristically explores with tongue-in-cheek sarcasm the view that somehow the reply still fell short. Wumen suggests, "Master Dongshan attained something like clam-Zen. He wedged open the two halves of his shell and exposed all the guts and innards inside. But tell me, how do you see Dongshan?"

In addition to the *Gateless Gate*'s brief commentary, Yuanwu's much more extensive remarks in the *Blue Cliff Record* maintain that this case has been particularly misunderstood by many interpreters:

> It really is hard to chew on, since there is no place for you to sink your teeth into. That is because it is bland and flavorless. The ancients had quite a few answers to the question, "What is Buddha?" One said, "The one in the shrine"; another said, "The thirty-two auspicious marks"; and another said, "A bamboo rod on a mountain forest of staffs." In contrast to these Dongshan said, "Three pounds of flax." He could not be stopped from cutting off the tongues of the ancients.

Yuanwu proclaims the superiority of Dongshan's expression, apparently because it does not attempt to answer the question either with a direct reference to the qualities of Buddha, as in the first two responses, or with indirect imagery, as in the third example. Dongshan's response cuts off conceptualization at its roots. In another passage Yuanwu says, "Dongshan does not reply lightly to this monk; he is like a bell when struck or like a valley causing an echo. Great or small, he responds accordingly, never daring to make a careless impression."

The remainder of Yuanwu's discussion revolves around exposing various common misapprehensions of the case by delineating and refuting four kinds of wrong views. One is literalism in that "many people base their understanding on the words uttered and say that Dongshan was in the storehouse at the time weighing out flax when the monk questioned him, and that is why he answered in this way." Another is contrariness because "some say that when Dongshan is asked about the east, he answers about the west." A third misunderstanding reflects indirection: "Some say that since you already are Buddha, and yet you still go to ask about Buddha, Dongshan answers this in a meandering way." The fourth is based on realism in that "there are those who have a way of saying that the three pounds of flax is itself Buddha."

According to Yuanwu, "these interpretations are all irrelevant. If you seek this way from Dongshan's words, you can search until Maitreya Buddha is born down here and still never see the truth even in

a dream." He then cites a verse from his own teacher, Wuzu, who was also highly respected for his koan interpretations:

> The cheap-selling board-carrying fellow,
> Weighs out three pounds of flax.
> With a hundred thousand years' worth of unsold goods,
> He has no place to put it all.

Yuanwu remarks that Wuzu's verse can "do away with your defiled feelings and thoughts, or judgments based on gain and loss, and when these are completely purified once and for all, you will spontaneously understand."

While the Dongshan case is notable for creating a nonresponsive reply, which seemingly has no connection to the question, in contrast to Zhaozhou's cypress-tree-in-the-courtyard reply, with its deep layers of symbolism, by far the most famous example of the use of terse wording is *Gateless Gate* case 1, "Zhaozhou's Dog," cited previously: A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does even a dog have the Buddha-nature or not?" Zhaozhou replied, "No." This koan consists of a deceptively simple yet endlessly perplexing question-and-answer exchange, which is completed by a provocative single-word response from the master without further dialogue or comment. However, there are other versions of the case in classic collections with positive responses or follow-up dialogues or both.

Zhaozhou's "No" represents a deliberately puzzling and contradictory reply to the monk's inquiry that evokes a seemingly sardonic view of one of the most basic and far-reaching theoretical issues in Mahayana Buddhism. Based on a famous passage from the *Nirvana Sutra,* the doctrine of an all-pervasive Buddha-nature encompassing living and, for some interpretations, nonliving beings as well became the fundamental tenet supported by the major scholastic schools of Tang dynasty China. According to Chinese Buddhist teachings, *everything* has Buddha-nature, or the potential to attain awakening. A primary area of controversy concerns whether this quality really encompasses all things. As a culmination of extensive debates held during the early Tang period, an eighth-century Buddhist philosopher named Zhanran proclaimed unequivocally that Buddha-nature incorporates all sentient as well as insentient beings. For example, a

dog may have a greater sense of reason and emotions than many creatures, but even the stone or river demonstrates the spiritual qualities of no-mind because these beings are not thinking or feeling.

Ninth-century Southern school Zen masters including Zhaozhou did not necessarily accept such a view of unimpeded universality, which was also reflected in some of the teachings of the pre-Huineng Northern school. As an example of Zen skepticism in regard to universality, master Weishan was known to say, "All living beings originally do not have Buddha-nature," and Nanquan said ironically of humans in relation to other kinds of sentient beings, "If the one making a gift is thinking of giving, he enters hell like an arrow. If the one getting a gift is thinking of receiving, he is bound to be reborn as an animal." Also, when asked by a monk, "What is my Buddha-nature?" a master from that era replied, "Go away! Go away! You do not have Buddha-nature." This suggests that while humans may be superior to other beings, if they trumpet this egoistically, their sense of true awareness is lost.

The Chinese character for "No," which suggests that the question is absurd, can also imply metaphysical emptiness or nothingness, and it was used this way in many Buddhist and Daoist philosophical writings. In that sense, "No" paradoxically means, "Yes," since all sentient and insentient beings partake of the universal spiritual reality. The importance of contemplating the term is reflected in Wumen's prose comments:

> In order to master Zen, you must pass the barrier of the patriarchs. To attain this subtle realization, you must completely cut off the ordinary way of thinking. . . . What is the barrier of the patriarchs? It is this single word "No." That is the front gate to Zen. Therefore, it is called the "Gateless Gate of Zen." If you pass through it, you will not only see Zhaozhou face-to-face, but you will also go hand in hand with the patriarchs, entangling your eyebrows with theirs by seeing with the same eyes and hearing with the same ears.

Because of the emphasis on the single syllable "no," in other expressions of enlightenment Zen masters use as little rhetoric as possible. One bit of expansion is a brief poem referred to as the "20 No's,"

in which Wumen evokes the technique of concentrating one's whole body and entire spirit on this term. The word is repeated for emphasis in four lines with five characters each by following a traditional Chinese poetic form frequently used in Buddhist poetry, including most koan collection commentaries:

No, no, no, no, no
No, no, no, no, no
No, no, no, no, no
No, no, no, no, no.

In Chinese, the poem looks this way:

無無無無無。
無無無無無。
無無無無無。
無無無無無.

As a modern example of the way this one-word barrier functions, a contemporary Western meditator reports how she was trained by Yamada Mumon, formerly a famous abbot at Daitokuji temple in Kyoto who published dozens of commentaries on various koan collections. The lay follower says that Yamada "told me I must become one with Mu [Japanese for "no"]. I must die the great death [of the ego, of the self, of ordinary identity] using Mu as my sword, in order to get at the truest answer to the question, 'Who am I?' " After several weeks of contemplation in which this practitioner went through periods of anxiety and exasperation mixed with stimulation and consolation, she indicates that during a trainee's ritual interview with the teacher her dismay was thoroughly overcome as concentration on *mu* rendered superfluous any concern with the source dialogue: "I went into sanzen and I WAS. . . . I didn't have any answers; I didn't care. I wasn't going anywhere; there wasn't anywhere to go. It didn't matter to me whether or not I answered this koan. It didn't matter who I was; I just was. I was fully there. I took a breath and let out my 'Mu.' I was Mu."

The atmosphere of this anecdote about becoming fully one with *mu,* or "No," makes an intriguing contrast with Yamada's much harsher treatment of one of his novices, who was training at Daitokuji

temple. This incident was recorded in a fascinating scene near the conclusion of a film on Japanese Buddhism titled *Land of the Disappearing Buddha,* which appears in the still popular Long Search series of documentaries on world religions produced by the BBC in the 1970s. To buttress a focus on an intense personalizing of *mu* by making it into one's own authentic form of contemplation, in modern Zen monastic practice disciples are often asked to present their distinctive interpretation of the one-word barrier as part of the exercise of being tested by the master.

In this instance, the reserved yet bemused British narrator, theater director Ronald Eyre, has the opportunity to observe a private interview between teacher and disciple at the prominent Rinzai temple in the ancient capital. During this session, a young monk who seems very much dedicated to the task of solving the case roars the word *mu* rather like a mad dog adding a punch line to some insider joke. It certainly appears to the viewer at first glance that he connects powerfully with the truth of "No" as the ultimate reality of nothingness. However, Yamada is hardly impressed, and he calmly and unflinchingly dismisses the novice by commenting that the answer must come from the inner depths and not be pronounced by the lips alone. A mechanical, rote-learning repetition of catchphrases rather than genuine expression (or silence) is the bane of teachers who supervise koan studies. Even though it seems like the disciple was screaming not just an ordinary articulation of *mu,* but *muuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu,* he nevertheless failed to communicate in an appropriate way reflecting his authentic understanding of Zen. Yamada quickly rings the bell, signaling that the time for the private interview is up and it is now the slot for evaluating the next disciple, waiting patiently in queue for his turn to be tested.

The koan about the dog's having or not having Buddha-nature was for more than a century situated at the very center of strenuous Song dynasty factional debates that continued to resonate in later periods about the role of language for expressing Zen realization. According to the approach first implemented by Dahui and generally endorsed by the Rinzai school in China and Japan as well as the Joygye Order in Korea, the word "No" is a sufficient tool for attaining

enlightenment if properly appreciated and practiced. According to Dahui's instructions to his followers:

> Please concentrate on the feeling of doubt and do not give it up whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down. This one word "No" is none other than the knife which can clear away the great doubt of life and death. The handle of this knife is right in your own hand. No one else can take hold of it for you, but you must do it yourself. If you are willing to lay down your life, you will be able to begin the task. However, if you are not willing to lay down your life, you should concentrate on the feeling of doubt and do not let it slip by.

For Dahui, "No" is an instrument that gives a deathblow to ignorance. But the contrary view that was generally endorsed by the Soto school along with some Rinzai masters argues that using this term represents the beginning rather than the end of an ongoing process of self-reflection and self-discovery. During koan training, as indicated in Dogen's critique of both Deshan and the old woman, one must recognize that the vagaries and excesses of rhetoric are not problematic but are crucial for sharpening the mind.

An alternative interpretative standpoint to Dahui's approach is based on the fact that there was another prominent version of the case in which Zhaozhou answered "No" in one instance yet also responded "Yes" in response to a repeat of the inquiry. This rendition generated considerable commentary, which is featured in the classic koan collection *Record of Serenity* by Soto masters Hongzhi and Wansong and the "Buddha-nature" chapter of Dogen's *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye.* Both of these works contain commentary that deliberately oscillates between positive and negative responses instead of highlighting only "No."

The following comments, taken from another classic commentary, express a master's playful reversal of remarks suited to the different responses: "A monk asked Zhaozhou, 'Does even a dog have Buddha-nature or not?' and Zhaozhou said, 'No.' Swift like a long sword from the sky, and blunt as an iron hammer without a cavity. Again a [or "another"] monk asked Zhaozhou, 'Does even a dog have

Buddha-nature or not?' and Zhaozhou said, 'Yes.' Blunt as an iron hammer without a cavity, and swift like a long sword from the sky."

The commentator concludes by urging the disciple he was instructing: "You clever fellow, use this sideways and turn it upside down and you will gain everything on earth below and in heaven above." However, the master then evokes tongue-in-cheek sarcasm to belittle Zhaozhou by saying, "Maybe this is all the one-hundred-and-twenty-years-old blind man will be able to hold in his bare hands."

The koan about whether the dog has Buddha-nature captures the entire process of attaining enlightenment. This starts with generating a great doubt that pulls the rug out from under convenient assumptions and conventional attitudes. It then causes a breakthrough experience to a new way of understanding reality beyond logic and concludes with a cryptic form of expression that stimulates further reflection but without leaving a residue of attachment. Whether a trainee studies this case by itself, or along with others for shorter or longer periods, the result if properly approached is to a state of realization free from the fetters of ordinary existence.

CHAPTER 5

Monastic Transmission

Cases Reflecting Mythology, Monasticism, and Succession

Disturbances and Disruptions in and Around the Temple

In a bygone era when the forming and recording of dialogues about the exploits of Zen's extraordinary masters was being developed, koan literature and practice played a special role in the noteworthy transitions and remarkable growth of the Zen tradition in Chinese society. Zen emerged during the Tang dynasty as a renegade spiritual movement located in the southern area, far from the halls of power. It used shocking teaching methods and found itself positioned on the fringes of society, although its leaders occasionally gained the support of powerful secular officials, such as the scholar-diplomat who commented on Zen writings, Pei Xiu, in the mid-ninth century. After a prolonged period in which all Buddhist and other foreign religions were suppressed, Zen emerged during the Song dynasty as a full-fledged mainstream religious institution. It was integrated on diverse levels with the machinations of the imperial court, especially through the profuse production of elegant literature and the location of its main temples in or near the capital of Hangzhou.

Many koan cases focus on how a practitioner should confront doubt to gain enlightenment and efficaciously express his understanding of personal transformation. These provocative stories particularly appealed to the free thinkers and spiritual aspirants among the class of scholar-officials. They craved the sense of utter independence from ordinary intellectual constraints that Zen dialogues eloquently evoked. While numerous koans perform multiple or

overlapping rhetorical functions, another set of cases highlights the ways that anointed masters were able to face the new challenge of opening and operating their own temples. Their main tasks included maintaining regularity and order in the monastic compound as well as selecting successors, who would be able to propagate the lineage either at that temple or by establishing a new site, chosen because its conditions were favorable for attracting followers.

These accounts of administrating temple affairs were crucial for presenting to an orderly society an image of Zen as an eminently creative enterprise, but one that was not overly freewheeling to the point of being undisciplined and out of control. The Zen school stood in a perpetual rivalry with other Chinese religions, particularly Confucianism. Song dynasty Confucian thinkers often criticized what seemed to be Zen's countercultural tendencies, or its willingness to breach etiquette or forgo ethics in pursuit of mystical truth transcending mundane affairs. By not being clear about moral judgments, the Confucians charged, koans sometimes endorsed actions that might lead to unchecked transgressions, such as cutting a cat in half.

Therefore, the disciplinary side of transmission-based koan narratives, in particular their portrayals of upholding principles of the systems of family loyalty and filial piety, became an increasingly important way of depicting Zen's relation to society. Any moral lapses had to be immediately and at times harshly punished. This pattern of self-presentation as an ethical religion played out effectively in the context of Japan and Korea. In Japan, Zen's method of self-discipline, which helped stimulate astonishing achievements in the fine and performing arts, charmed the samurai leaders, who adopted koan techniques for training their legions of warriors.

Once placed in charge of teaching others by inheriting or opening his own temple, a Zen master immediately became a benignly autocratic administrator of a sacred realm with its own distinctive sense of social order. The world of the temple included a hierarchy of monks, based on seniority and function, who regularly undertook contemplative activities governed by daily, monthly, and annual cycles as well as major life events, such as initiation, ordination, and advancement in the order in addition to death, burial, and memorials. Using

the term "autocracy" in this context is not intended in a pejorative sense. Rather, it refers to the unique capacity of the charismatic abbot, who was portrayed as a living Buddha or intermediary linking the divine and human worlds. At the end of the day, he alone bore responsibility for enforcing monastic rules and regulations, while also inspiring monks to attain the utmost levels in their respective religious quests.

The master's decisions were by no means made capriciously or without precedent. A checks-and-balances system had been in place since the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, who excelled at establishing communities of monks and formulating rules for their governance. Buddha spent several decades after his own enlightenment traveling around India to visit and help oversee various monastic groups and set up rules to manage difficult situations. He provided a comprehensive set of behavioral codes in a set of writings known as the Vinaya, which contains detailed guidelines for each and every sort of circumstance monks would face.

Although, like all Buddhist schools, it firmly adhered to the hallowed Vinaya, one of the primary innovations of the Zen school was to rewrite some of these procedures in an additional set of monastic regulations known as the Pure Rules. This voluminous work is attributed to master Baizhang, one of Mazu's main disciples, still celebrated as a luminary figure of the lineage. The Pure Rules is considered complementary to the Vinaya, since it carries out some of its implications, but it is based on a new level of spiritual attainment accomplished through Zen meditation on koans that was particularly well suited to styles of conduct in East Asian society.

The main principles of the Pure Rules reflected in the narratives of koan cases include:

- The capacity of the temple leader to teach his disciples at levels appropriate to their learning needs in both public and private settings.
- Dispensing altogether with the worship hall, which was the main building on the compound in the temples of other Buddhist schools, since with the advent of the new abbot system it was no longer needed; however, because this type of facility was crucial

for fund-raising efforts with lay officials, it is highly unlikely that the rule was actually followed.

- The necessity for community manual labor to be performed by all members of the assembly, including the abbot; again, the implication that monks became self-sufficient farmers is dubious, although it was true that they completed temple chores.
- The view that each and every aspect of activity, from daily tasks such as washing breakfast bowls to studies of koan literature and zazen, or seated meditation, reflects one's understanding of the dharma.
- Having a set of ten officers who control temple functions and ritual ceremonies and also hold the power to identify and punish wrongdoers.
- Taking additional severe measures against offenders who bring shame to the monastery, including flogging, burning belongings, and finally excommunication. These punitive measures are harsher than in the Vinaya, where greater emphasis was placed on repentance than on retribution.

It is clear from this list of rules that, because the demands on monastic participants were so strict, there was always an expectation that disturbances to the protocols and disruptions of ethical values could erupt from many different angles. Sometimes troubles were brought on by spirits and supernatural forces, which were thought to enter surreptitiously into the compound, or at least this mythology was used to explain the onset of some kinds of dreaded disorders. Threats to authority were also ever present from strange and irregular practitioners, such as hermits and grannies, lurking in the forests and mountain passes near temples. In addition, itinerant monks might barge through the gates to question or create a spiritual contest on the spot with the resident master, who had to be prepared to respond. Most of all, of course, commotion emerged within the temple grounds from lax or wayward monks requiring chastisement or, in some instances, from the acts of abbots, who then needed prodding from their faithful flock.

A case that shows the great importance of following temple rules as part of the mystical quest derives from the account of Dogen being

invited near the end of his life by the shogun to start a new monastery in the temporary capital of Kamakura, a town located near present-day Tokyo. When he declined the warlord's offer, he left at once and retired to his own monastery in the northwestern provinces, leaving behind a pupil, the priest Gemmyo, to settle his affairs. This rejection at once infuriated the ruler and deepened his respect. He persuaded Gemmyo to take a document of a generous grant of land to his teacher. Once Dogen learned of this breach of protocol by a prominent disciple, the master became so outraged that he at once drove the student away. He ordered the meditation platform Gemmyo sat on destroyed and the ground under it dug three feet deep, with the earth thrown away so that nobody else could ever occupy that spot. After this incident, it is said that his followers, who appreciated his firm commitment to ethical guidelines, admired Dogen more than ever.

This episode indicates that diligent leaders, ever aware of their standing among the larger community of Zen temples, frequently called for humiliation and the expulsion of unruly troublemakers and deceivers. The Pure Rules code indicates that there are four main reasons for the severest punishment: (1) it leaves the rank-and-file monks uncompromised; (2) it keeps Zen's reputation for purity in practice from being besmirched; (3) it avoids public litigation; and (4) it prevents news of the affair from spreading to other temples. In short, this approach makes clear that Zen is not an unorthodox, subversive "wild fox" cult easily succumbing to violations of morality.

The legalistic approach of Dogen's dismissal of his impetuous student has the merit of preserving a sense of purity by punishing reprehensible behavior or malevolent deeds, even if these were not necessarily intended with ulterior motives. However, extreme cases like the ostracism of Gemmyo seem to leave little room for caring about the redemption of the offender through the dynamics of repentance, a ritual that could transform transgression into meritorious behavior. Thus, there may be a shortcoming in the ethical component of koans seeking to disclose ultimate reality beyond mundane affairs because they do not allow for a coming to terms with the issue of making amends and redeeming immoral behavior. Ideally, Zen masters and their followers, who are often celebrated for preaching a

form of "divine madness," should know well when to follow rules and when to bend or break them at their own discretion. This is done not to violate but to enhance the fundamental awareness of spirituality that generated the formation of the Pure Rules regulations in the first place.

Mythology: Taming Humans and Spirits

Several koans depict how spirits and supernatural forces interfering with temple affairs need to be contained and tamed by the master as a show of maintaining orderliness. Perhaps the most famous example is *Gateless Gate* case 2, "Baizhang's Wild Fox," in which a mischievous fox spirit suddenly appeared as a monk while the master was giving a sermon. The background to the story is that foxes were understood in East Asia to be shape-shifting tricksters that could take a human form, usually to try to seduce or otherwise betray their victim. However, the foxes could also have a more generous motive, coming to the rescue of someone in distress such as a widower or lonely warrior or priest. In Japan, where foxes were long associated with rice fertility, their iconic image, known as Inari, became an object of worship

Fox as an object of veneration. Photo by the author.

that was enshrined in many different Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines.

Even though the fox exhibits demonic energy in some situations, once its spiritual force is transmuted into serving as a protector of the dharma, the fox's benevolent power makes it auspiciously effective as a guardian deity. It could ward off from the temple grounds various sorts of troublesome activities. The interaction of benevolent and malevolent forces within a single entity was based on a long-standing Buddhist theme going back to the enlightenment of Sakyamuni. It is said that prior to his awakening, Buddha was protected during a monsoon by a Naga (a dragon or snake spirit that can shape-shift) serving as an umbrella while he continued to sit unperturbed in meditation.

The Baizhang case narrative is relatively long and complex, so it is summarized here in terms of four main stages. First, a monk with a beard and foxtail peeking through the bottom of his robe came to Baizhang's public lecture but stayed behind after the other monks in the assembly departed. He confessed that he was not really a human being—or, put another way, he was a "nonhuman," a generic term for spirits, gods, and ghosts, the existence of which was probably taken for granted in the context of the premodern worldview of East Asian culture. The fox/monk was being punished over the course of many lifetimes of reincarnation for once claiming that Zen masters were not subject to the law of karmic causality. He begged Baizhang by saying, "I have been transfigured into a wild fox body. Now, master, may I ask you to express a transformative word that will turn my speaking around and release me from this wild fox condition."

The second part of the case is the core dialogue in which the fox/monk asked Baizhang, "Does even a person of great cultivation [one who is enlightened] fall into causality or not?" The master answered, "Such a person does not obscure causality." On hearing these words, the fox/monk experienced a great awakening. He bowed and said, "I am now released from the wild fox transfiguration, and my fox corpse is already lying behind the gates of the temple compound. Master, may I dare to request that you bury it with the rites accorded a deceased monk?"

In the third section, the master instructed the monk in charge of rituals to strike the clapper and announce to the assembly that a monk's burial would be taking place after the midday meal. The monks were puzzled and wondered, "Who could this be, as we are all healthy and no one has been sick in the nirvana hall [infirmary]?" After the meal, the master led the assembly behind the temple gates, where he used his staff to uncover the carcass of a wild fox lying under a large rock. The fox corpse was cremated in accord with the regulations for Buddhist funeral rites.

The final part of the case indicates that later in the evening, during his sermon in the main public hall, Baizhang told the curious congregation the whole story concerning the dialogue about causality and its aftermath. Thereupon, his disciple Huangbo asked, "The old monk was transfigured into a wild fox for five hundred lifetimes because he used an incorrect phrase. Suppose his phrase had not been incorrect, what then would have happened?" The master replied, "Come up here and I'll explain it to you." After hesitating, Huangbo approached Baizhang and slapped him. The master, clapping his hands while laughing, exclaimed, "I thought it was only the barbarian [Bodhidharma] who had a red beard, but here is another red-bearded barbarian!"

This case is unusually rich in terms of supernatural and ritual elements involving the multifaceted encounter between a mysterious visitor making a request and Baizhang, the creator of the Pure Rules, also known for a strict adherence to the notion of "a day without work is a day without eating." Once when he was very old and tired, his disciples hid his tools to prevent him from laboring in the fields, but he went out that day nevertheless. The fox/monk represents the forces of disruption and chaos that potentially plague even a stern abbot's monastery and that need to be vetted and eliminated.

These rhetorical ingredients convey a philosophical message about the need to adhere to the law of karma by resisting the tendency to allow a mystical notion of the nonduality of good and evil to become an unfortunate rationale for antinomian behavior. The fox/monk paradoxically attains freedom from causality when Baizhang instructs him that causality prevails in all instances. Therefore, the narrative highlights the necessity to adhere to Zen monastic rules at every turn.

However, this complicated situation raises an interesting question about the role of the funeral, which piqued the interest of monks in the assembly. Several traditional commentaries on the case point out that, strictly speaking, it would not be appropriate to provide traditional Buddhist burial rites for a nonhuman being. This was explicitly forbidden by the early Buddhist rules contained in the Vinaya. On the other hand, Baizhang demonstrates that he can bend a rule when appropriate for the sake of enforcing the spiritual basis of all regulations. However, Huangbo's slapping the master indicates that there is no easy or fixed solution to the dilemma in trying to coordinate the monastic rules with spiritual awakening.

The next koan, "A Woman's (Qiannu) True Soul?," from *Gateless Gate* case 35, is another important example of a philosophical dialogue that is reliant on symbols absorbed from folk beliefs in supernatural powers, including bilocation and trance. These images demonstrate dramatically how disturbing forces can intrude upon the life of a person or community. According to the brief case record: "Fifth patriarch Hongren asked a monk, 'Qiannu's soul was divided into two parts. Which one was the true soul?' " In asking which manifestation is the true Qiannu, the case is usually interpreted in terms of the issue of nonduality. The theoretical topic concerns how a person can be divided into component parts, such as body and soul. Human existence, which is not an object, constitutes an indivisible collective whole, yet unity is not asserted by the case in a way that might conceal the distinctiveness of particular manifestations.

Wumen's verse commentary establishes the relation between identity and difference in the first two lines: "Clouds and moon fuse into a single pale shade, / Valleys and mountains, so distinct." The poem concludes with an ironic rhetorical question that scrupulously avoids a commitment to either view as an exclusive side of the polarity: "Hundreds of thousands of blessings— / Is this oneness or differentiation?" In the prose commentary Wumen cautions against misrepresentations by saying, "When earth, water, fire, and wind disintegrate all at once, you will be like a lobster fallen into a pot of boiling water, frantically thrashing about with its arms and legs. At that time, do not say I didn't warn you."

While this case functions on an abstract theoretical level when understood as a scholastic exercise, it is important to recognize that the koan record is based on a famous Tang dynasty ghost tale expressing the theme of duty versus passion. The folktale uses supernatural elements, such as a spirit journey, in the story of a young woman whose parents have resisted her wedding plans. To them she appears to be sick and lifeless since she has been separated for five years from the man she loves. The spirit of Qiannu manifests in a physical form when she is saddened by her parents' proposal for an arranged marriage. Her alienated soul runs off with her true lover to a remote area and they are married. But, five years later, they decide to return home out of a sense of loyalty to Qiannu's family, while her former self has spent the time in a sickbed unable to move.

The father is at first incredulous because his daughter has been terribly ill, but he realizes that the "other Qiannu" was indeed in a secret marriage. Qiannu is reunited with her tormented soul, which was present in a body lying motionless for the entire duration of her flight. Now purged of feelings of guilt and deception, everyone is able to experience a sense of harmony and fulfilled responsibilities. As in the Daoist anecdote of Zhuangzi's "butterfly dream," however, Qiannu admits that she herself cannot tell her real identity: is it the person sick in bed or the one who has been married?

Looking at the koan from the standpoint of the folklore dimension indicates that the simple though profound philosophical issue of nonduality is amplified by an emphasis on the disturbing emotional experiences of the main character. These narrative elements highlight the tensions involved in the crossing over of a variety of borders, including social boundaries involving security and alienation or family and outcast status, as well as metaphysical boundaries such as self and other, life and death, or human and ghostly realms. This shows that strict discipline in the monastic compound cannot suppress liminal and dreamlike experiences from coming forth to a conscious level. Yet Qiannu's final declaration about the unsettling and irreconcilable issue of her personal identity suggests that the theoretical debate concerning universality versus particularity remains an enigma.

Another verse comment highlights the imagery of death that is suggested by the case's reference to Qiannu's double identity:

Peach branches and reeds in front,
Paper money after the funeral cart,
O disciples of the old foreigner,
You will not enter into the realm of the dead.

The first two lines refer to customs for keeping away demons in traditional Chinese funeral processions, indicating that the mythical issue of where the dead soul resides and how it returns to life is intertwined with the symbolic issue of maintaining social order. The third line is a frequently used ironic self-criticism of Zen monks, who were disciples of Bodhidharma. The final line suggests that the central philosophical question about the permeability of boundaries separating pairs of opposites has a paradoxical conclusion.

The boundaries are at once navigable and impenetrable: life is inseparable from death and yet life is distinctively life, and death is distinctively death. Thus, universality and particularity, and oneness and multiplicity, are ever intertwined. The conclusion in the form of a challenge moves the koan beyond mere intellectual abstraction and dares the Zen disciple to attain the degree of insight of folk heroine Qiannu. In a sense, she is the one riding in the funeral cart—or perhaps she escaped this fate—to and from the land of the dead (or enlightenment).

In another example of domesticating supernatural forces that affect temple life, an anecdote contained in the recorded sayings of Linji (founder of the Rinzai school) known as "Puhua Passes Away" features an irregular monk who possesses special abilities. About half a dozen passages are included in Linji's record about the complex relationship between the rascal Puhua, whose name literally means "universal (*pu*) transformation (*hua*)," and the great master known for his severe yet highly effective teaching tactics. Linji was at once assisted and challenged by Puhua, who on several occasions one-ups or embarrasses the Zen master by turning over dining tables or braying like a donkey in public. Yet, Linji puts up with and seems to accept the role of his friendly nemesis. The case is also notable for highlighting Puhua's seemingly unique manner of dying in

light of the ways that Zen patriarchs passed away as well as the matter of the propriety of Buddhist funerary rituals. According to the koan narrative:

> One day Puhua went around the streets of the town begging for someone to give him a "one-piece robe." Although there were people who offered it to him, he refused to accept any of their donations. Linji sent the monk in charge of temple affairs to buy a coffin. When Puhua returned to the temple that day, Linjii said, "I've made this one-piece robe for you." Puhua lifted up the coffin on his shoulders and went off with it. He paraded all over town, calling out, "Linji has made this one-piece robe for me! I am going to the east gate of the town now to take leave of this world!" The townspeople trailed after him to see what would happen. Puhua said, "I am not going to do it today. But tomorrow I will go to the south gate of the town to take leave of this world."
>
> After three days of this activity, no one in town took his proclamations seriously anymore. On the fourth day, when not a soul was trailing after or watching him, Puhua went all by himself outside the city gates, laid the coffin on the ground, and asked a passerby to nail down the lid. Immediately, word of this event spread all over town, and people came to find the coffin. But when they opened the lid, they saw that any trace of his body had completely vanished. All they heard was the clear, sharp sound of his hand bell tinkling in the air before this, too, faded away.

The koan about the fox/monk deals with the unconventional act of giving a regular Buddhist funeral for a shape-shifting spirit. The Puhua case is one of numerous examples in early Zen literature of monks who demonstrate the ability to conquer ordinary mortality and therefore do not require a traditional burial. In some instances, a master is able to predict or regulate the timing and posture (such as sitting in the lotus position) at the moment of dying, which transforms death from a source of pollution to a manifestation of supreme purity. Here, the posthumous disappearance of Puhua's body is in accord with images of miraculous afterlife occurrences of Buddhist saints and Zen patriarchs, including examples of empty coffins and pristine bodies that have not decayed.

This pattern was established in Zen records with the account of the emperor giving instructions for Bodhidharma's grave to be opened and finding an empty coffin with only one leather sandal inside. This phenomenon amazed the court, which had heard the rumor that Bodhidharma was seen walking back to India on a single sandal. There are also reports that at the time of his demise Bodhidharma exchanged skeletons with Huike. In addition, the third patriarch made the sign of a "gassho" greeting (hands joined at the chest) and then passed away. In another legendary account, the door of the fourth patriarch's stupa opened by itself, without any cause, on the anniversary of his death, and the body of the master looked as though he were alive, so that his disciples did not dare close the door.

When the fifth patriarch decided that his work as a Zen teacher was done, he announced he would depart from the world and entered his chamber. While sitting quietly he passed away, but only after delaying the date so that it did not fall on the anniversary of the Buddha's attainment of the Great Nirvana (his death). Furthermore, the sixth patriarch predicted his demise a month in advance. He left a lengthy departing poem and made an uncanny prediction concerning the future of his lineage.

Other passages in Linji's record also refer to the disappearance of Puhua, "body and all." The detailed explanation of the process of his dying given in this case clearly evokes the tradition of Daoist immortals, which influenced Buddhist asceticism and was often combined with Zen hagiographical depictions of the achievements of attained masters. Puhua's request for a "one-piece robe" lets everyone know he is planning to die, but he will accept the offering only from his mentor-cum-rival Linji. Ever the trickster, Puhua continues to tease the community, which awaits his imminent demise. Just as people begin to distrust his promise to take leave of this world, he finally makes an extraordinary display of spiritual prowess to control the timing of his death.

The folklore image of the bell tinkling in the air until it finally fades marks a sharp contrast with the rest of Linji's record, which contains numerous passages that are rigorously iconoclastic and anti-supernatural. Linji often used the symbolism of wild foxes as a sarcastic epithet for unruly, rogue monks, and he also condemned the

religiosity of bodhisattva worship that looks outward instead of "killing the Buddha" to find an exclusively inner enlightenment. He forbade monks from participating in the visionary experiences on Mount Wutai. Yet, Linji apparently also had a begrudging respect for Puhua, who several times bested him in this-worldly dharma combat and now has realized a supreme otherworldly accomplishment. The pagoda inscription of Linji refers to Puhua as "a madman" and questions whether he was "a common mortal or a sage." But it also notes that the timing of the death of Puhua, after he had spent time assisting yet confounding Linji, was in perfect accord with the prediction of Yangshan, one of the top administrators of the monastery.

Monasticism: Enforcing Rules and Regulations

Challenges to the authority of the master running a Zen temple often came from practitioners who gained renown while meditating or studying outside the gates. According to the record of *Gateless Gate* case 11, "Zhaozhou Checks Out Two Hermits":

> Zhaozhou went to where a hermit was staying and asked, "Are you there? Are you there?" The hermit raised his fist. Zhaozhou said, "A ship cannot anchor where the water is shallow," and then he abruptly took leave. Zhaozhou later came upon where another hermit was staying and called out, "Are you there? Are you there?" This hermit also raised his fist. Zhaozhou said, "You have the ability to give and to take, to kill and to give life," and then he bowed.

Apparently the master has heard that these hermits had attained a special level of spiritual accomplishment, and he decides to visit them in their huts or caves to test their abilities. When asked the question, "Are you there?"—meaning, in effect, "Demonstrate your spiritual power!"—both hermits give the same nonverbal response, holding up a fist, perhaps somewhat defiantly. But they receive opposite evaluations from the master: the first hermit is criticized as being like shallow water, whereas the second one is praised for being able to give and take life like a double-edged sword, an image mentioned in Wumen's verse commentary.

The key ritual element in this koan involves the master's tenuous and contested relationship with the hermits. Who are these mysteri-

ous figures, and why is Zhaozhou compelled to encounter them? Other cases feature irregular practitioners like a Daoist immortal (Puhua), a granny as confronted by both Zhaozhou and Deshan, or in other instances a Buddhist wizard, a non-Buddhist philosopher, an envisioned bodhisattva, or a local shaman. Although their identities or status are not identified in the case record, background studies of typical practices of the period indicate that these hermits are very likely enlightened followers of a Zen lineage, although not necessarily from Zhaozhou's own branch. They have probably secluded themselves after their main period of training in a monastery in order to fortify their contemplative state while preparing for a return to everyday society. The main point is that the hermits have not skipped over or avoided the stage of receiving a regular transmission, as have irregular practitioners in some other koan cases.

Therefore, the hermits are already legitimate members of the Zen school still needing to be "checked out" by the local established master, who may feel threatened that their prowess will attract followers away from his temple. An alternative translation of the case title is "Zhaozhou Sees through the True Nature of Two Hermits." This version probably conveys the result of the process but does not necessarily express the extent and significance of the testing of wills that underlies the encounter dialogue. After all, it seems that the second hermit defeats Zhaozhou, or at least the master must acknowledge the merit of this irregular practitioner's spiritual attainment.

On what basis is the judgment, pro or con, being made about the hermits, especially the positive view of the second practitioner? Wumen's remarks get right to the heart of the matter by asking, "Both hermits raised a fist. Why did Zhaozhou approve of the one and disapprove of the other? What is the meaning of this contradictory behavior?" Zhaozhou's evaluations are a double-edged sword, according to Wumen's commentary. They may be seen as demonstrating the effectiveness—or, perhaps, lack of this—of Zhaozhou's own supranormal power to gain insight into the past karma and current status of the hermits' respective spiritual states.

The question Wumen raises is then responded to by him with high praise for the master: "If you are able to capture it in a turning word, then you will realize that Zhaozhou's tongue has no bone and

he can freely give the one hermit a boost and the other one a put-down." However, Wumen also makes an intriguing final point by suggesting with characteristic obscurity that both Zhaozhou and the two hermits cannot be understood as representing either correct or incorrect standpoints: "But do you also realize the flip side in that Zhaozhou is being checked out by the hermits? If you suggest that either of the hermits is superior or inferior, then you do not display the eye of Zen. Or, if you suggest that there is no distinction whatsoever between the hermits, then you also do not display the eye of Zen."

The next koan concerning challenges to the monastic system from outside the gates is a case found in several classic collections, "A Hermit's 'The Mountain Torrent Runs Deep, so the Ladle Is Long.'" This narrative shows further the competitive relationship between an established master occupying a mountain temple and an irregular practitioner located somewhere nearby who must be judged either rogue or legitimate. The two parties face an important turning point. If the practitioner is found deficient, he has to be expelled from the area because he represents a potentially disruptive force. But, if legitimate, he must be acknowledged and incorporated into the monastic system. Numerous cases deal with the banishment of rogue practitioners, but this case highlights the role of assimilating them into the mainstream. The koan record reads:

> A monk dwelled in a hermitage at the foot of a prominent Zen mountain temple. He lived there for many years practicing meditation, but without having his head shaved. Making a wooden ladle, the solitary monk drew and drank water from a mountain torrent. One day, a monk from the monastery at the top of the mountain visited the hermit and asked, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?" The hermit responded, "The mountain torrent runs deep, so the handle of a wooden ladle must be appropriately long."
>
> The monk reported this to the master of Xuefeng temple, who declared, "He sounds like a strange character, perhaps an anomaly or spirit. I'd better go at once and check him out for myself." The next day, master Xuefeng went to see the hermit while carry-

ing a razor and accompanied by his attendant monk. As soon as they met he said, "If you can express the Way, I won't shave your head." On hearing this, the hermit at first was speechless. But then he used the ladle to bring water to have his head washed, and Xuefeng shaved the hermit's head.

The hermit in this case must have been particularly astute since his reputation spread and alarmed the leaders of the monastic institution situated on the mountain. The hermit gives the monastery monk a characteristically indirect, even absurd, although eminently practical response. The ironic Zen style of the reply—drawing water symbolizes profound wisdom—piques the curiosity of Xuefeng, who decides to go and test the irregular practitioner. Bringing a razor and an attendant along with him indicates that the master is confident that he will be able to shave the bearded hermit, who has not heretofore taken the tonsure. In his commentary on the case in the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* Dogen accepts the authenticity of the hermit's considerable spiritual attainment but also maintains that the overall encounter indicates the superiority of Xuefeng. The mountain master has earned the right to be testing and domesticating the hermit. His administration of the tonsure is symbolic of an important stage in the development of the Zen school that incorporates the irregular but legitimate practitioner into the auspices of an official Zen lineage.

While the previous cases showed masters dealing with outside threats, in *Gateless Gate* case 13, "Deshan Carries His Bowl," this time the disturbance to monastic order, though slight and subtle, seems to be caused by the temple abbot. Master Deshan appears to commit a minor but nevertheless rather serious faux pas in terms of behavioral etiquette delineated in the Pure Rules. He is reprimanded for this by one of his disciples, Yantou, who accuses him of not being capable of articulating the "last word" of Zen. After a private exchange with this follower, Deshan redeems himself by giving an unusually inspirational sermon and receives Yantou's highest praise.

This koan is particularly significant for examining the role of authority in the process of lineage transmission as well as for casting the master-disciple relation between Deshan and Yantou in terms of

the familial model of parent and child. In addition, like some of the other cases dealing with clerical competition, it evokes art-of-war strategizing involving commanders and soldiers facing opponents on the field of battle. According to the case record:

> One day, master Deshan went down toward the dining room carrying his bowls. Xuefeng met him and asked, "Where are you off to with your bowls? The bell [signifying mealtime] has not yet rung, and the drum has not sounded." Deshan turned and went back to the abbot's quarter. Xuefeng mentioned this to Yantou, who remarked, "Deshan is renowned, but he does not know the 'last word.'" Deshan heard about this remark and sent his attendant to fetch Yantou. "You do not approve of me?" he asked. Yantou whispered his meaning.
>
> Deshan said nothing at the time, but the next day he ascended the platform in the sermon hall, and his demeanor was indeed very different from usual. Going toward the front of the hall, Yantou clapped his hands and laughed loudly saying, "Wonderful! Our master has got hold of the last word! From now on, nobody in this whole country can outdo him!"

There are five main structural elements in this deceptively simple narrative. The first element is the error in decorum made by Deshan, who at the time was eighty years old and near the end of his life. As an accomplished abbot, Deshan should have been well aware of and able to enforce the strictness of monastic rules regarding attendance at meals and sermons required for abbots, rectors, attendants, monks, and novices alike. The rules strictly forbade entering the dining hall until the bell had been rung and the drum sounded, regardless of extenuating circumstances. According to the Pure Rules, "Three drum sequences are struck to indicate that the abbot is approaching the hall. The administrators and chief officers bow to the abbot from their positions. After the bell in front of the hall is rung, the assembly descends from the platforms. The abbot enters the hall, venerates before the image of Buddha, and then bows simultaneously with the assembled monks."

This koan conjures a concern also addressed in a couple of other *Gateless Gate* cases about the need to follow rules of propriety that

seem like arbitrary restrictions without intrinsic value other than to regulate the way some monastic activities are conducted in relation to seasonal cycles and hours of the day. For example, case 26 deals with the raising of bamboo blinds, which marks the change of seasons, and in case 16 Yunmen asks rhetorically, "See how vast and wide the world is! Why do you put on your seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?" Nevertheless, Xuefeng feels perfectly justified in reprimanding the master for failing to comply.

In the second part of the narrative, Deshan immediately withdraws to his room, even though it is possible that he was not to blame for the error because the ringing of the bell may have been performed late, according to some versions of the koan. If this were the case, then the matter of who was right and who was wrong would need to be rethought. The *Gateless Gate* version suggests that the act of retreat is probably Deshan's way of shamefully recognizing defeat based on his blunder. Or, it could simply represent a nonconfrontational outlook that allows for time to pause and reflect on how the master should react to his underling's scolding, whether out of penitence or indifference to the rebuke.

The third structural element involves the notion of the last word of Zen. In this part of the case, Yantou the disciple passes a more thoroughgoing sense of judgment by calling into question Deshan's ability as a master, since he is unable to respond to the reprimand with a clever repartee. Yantou and Xuefeng, who is also featured in the case about the hermit discussed above, are known as a playful pair of monks whose antics as rival teachers once they became established masters are recorded in *Blue Cliff Record* cases 51 (also on the last word) and 66 (dealing with thirty blows of the staff). In *Gateless Gate* case 13, the pair has fun seemingly at their teacher's expense. According to one of the classic commentaries, "The family rebels and the home are disturbed. . . . The father is obscured by the son—the straight is held therein."

It is deliberately left unclear what the last word is supposed to mean or what Yantou would have whispered to Deshan in their private meeting. One way of understanding this passage is that the expression could represent any style of strange or extraordinary discourse that puts an abrupt end to all queries, criticisms, and conflicts

or decisively snuffs out arbitrary contrasts and judgments. This is precisely what Deshan noticeably failed to deliver when rebuffed by his follower. Instead of giving a comeback, he was hesitant and apparently stymied by a sense of conceptual paralysis.

In the fourth part of the narrative, Deshan apparently can tell that something is wrong with Yantou, and he inquires about the disciple's perspective on his leadership. Whatever Yantou says to his teacher behind closed doors is not disclosed in the case. This indicates that there is some kind of intimate connection and familiarity between master and disciple in which their roles are more or less equalized. A traditional interpretation would see this exchange as a prime example of silent transmission, which is suggested by a capping-phrase comment in the *Blue Cliff Record* using the image of a thunderclap heard by the gods. The role reversal of Yantou being the one to initiate the conversation is accommodated by similar examples, such as Baizhang being slapped by his disciple Huangbo at the conclusion of the koan about the fox/monk. While the whispering that takes place between master and disciple reflects one level of silence, another level is represented by the reticence of Deshan, who once again does not take the opportunity to put an end to the critical comments of his follower.

In the final part of the case, Deshan apparently has regrouped and is able to deliver a compelling sermon demonstrating to Yantou that he really does have the last word, after all. However, the reader of the case does not know what was expressed in his sermon and whether it lived up to expectations. In fact, in a characteristically ironic dismissive tone that is somewhat contradictory of Yantou's positive assessment of Deshan, a classic commentary refers to the master as "a toothless tiger." The comments then say he "still has claws" but end with the remark, "yet this too is adding error upon error." These remarks further indicate that Yantou says Deshan has "only three years to go." Sure enough, according to tradition, the master died three years later. Therefore, this passage suggests that Yantou holds real spiritual power all along, regardless of his rank.

The *Gateless Gate* verse commentary on the case emphasizes the significance of the last word in terms of its paradoxical relation to the "first word":

If you know the first word,
Then you understand the last word;
The last and the first—
Are they not this one word?

But what is this one word? Wumen's prose comment suggests in tongue-in-cheek fashion that neither master nor disciple really gets the point, as they turn into an idle Punch and Judy or Bert and Ernie partnership of folly: "As far as the last word is concerned, neither Yantou nor Deshan has ever known what this is even in a dream. Examining their dialogue is much like looking at puppets on a stage."

A classic commentary remarks, "Those who conceal an army to fight by night do not see Deshan. Those who attack occupied territory by day can hardly know Yantou. What they do not realize is that the battle commander picks fights by day, and the watch commander patrols the camp by night." According to this comment, influenced by art-of-war rhetoric, Deshan the master still rules in the night, which has the advantage overall, whereas Yantou the disciple leads the forces during the day.

Another koan dealing with the role of a master in relation to monastic behavior is "Baizhang Meditates on Great Sublime Peak." This brief record, which appears in numerous classic collections including *Blue Cliff Record* case 26, focuses on the connection between practice inside and outside the gates of the temple: "A monk asked Baizhang, 'What is the most extraordinary thing?' Baizhang said, 'Sitting alone on Great Sublime Peak.' The monk bowed, and Baizhang hit him." The background for the case is that, as the Southern school spread based on the efficacy of the shocking teaching methods of Mazu's lineage, numerous new monasteries were opened and established, especially in the mountainous regions just below the Yangzi River. The monasteries often were large compounds, in some cases with dozens of buildings that housed hundreds of monks. But outside the grounds of the temple, the hills and crests remained untamed and populated by irregular practitioners, magical animals, and other supernatural forces.

In this case, the key symbolic element is Great Sublime Peak, a high, rocky promontory located behind or just to the northwest of Mount Baizhang (literally, "Hundred Fathoms High"), which faced

to the south based on the laws of Chinese geomancy (*feng shui*). Master Baizhang, who supposedly created the Pure Rules system of monastic rules emphasizing the role of the abbot as the living Buddha, apparently took contemplative breaks from his temple by visiting the peak nearby. The area running between the monastery and Great Sublime Peak, where he meditated in reclusion, was probably filled with huts and hermitages. These sites were mostly for irregular practitioners, although monks from the temple used some in order to create a solitary and desolate atmosphere conducive to meditation. A number of prominent hermits lurking near the summit often had to fend off tigers prowling in that area. According to another dialogue making fun of the situation, Baizhang and his main disciple Huangbo talked about whether the latter was able to subdue any dangerous tigers during a trip to this peak. Then, following the disciple's irreverent response of roaring ferociously, Baizhang referred to Huangbo as a tiger.

The leading question in this case inquires of Baizhang, "What is 'extraordinary'?" The term for extraordinary that is commonly used in various kinds of Chinese folklore indicates the mysterious and anomalous realm of existence encompassing spirits, sprites, and otherworldly beings. The meaning of the term is very similar to the notion of the "marvelous" that has been used as a way of characterizing medieval European literature about the veneration of Christian saints and the incorporation of some pagan beliefs. An implication of the monk's question is that it would be expected that supernatural, marvelous elements transpire on secluded Great Sublime Peak. However, Baizhang interprets this as a query about the role of spiritual training. He dramatically slaps the disciple, apparently for being overly deferential rather than independent in his outlook and also for having expected to hear about religious elements extraneous to meditative practice.

At the same time, given Baizhang's role as an organizer of the monastic system, his response to the monk's question is surprising for mentioning an activity that takes place outside the temple gates. The master's emphasis on solitary meditation reveals the interplay between the realms of regularity and irregularity, or the mainstream institution and the domain of raw and untamed nature. The opening

line of the *Blue Cliff Record* verse commentary refers to Baizhang, the disciple of Mazu whose name literally means "horse," as a galloping heavenly colt. The last line identifies Baizhang as a tiger whose whiskers cannot be grasped:

> In the realm of the patriarchs, the heavenly colt goes galloping by,
> Among his styles of teaching, enfolding and unraveling are two different modes,
> He flashes the ability to shift with circumstance like a bolt of lightning or a spark struck from a stone,
> It's laughable how an ordinary monk thinks he can just grab the tiger by its whiskers!

This case gained prominence in part because it served as a topic for important commentaries in Dogen's lineage. First Dogen's Chinese mentor Rujing created a new approach to the dialogue in which he responded to the lead query by saying, "It is only to eat rice in a bowl at this temple." He thereby shifted the focus from solitary zazen outside the gates to everyday activities inside. Dogen reflected on this case several times in his works. In earlier writings, he cited Rujing's comments approvingly. But during a later sermon, Dogen rewrote the case by raising his staff and then throwing it down and stepping off the dais. Several years later, he again modified this dialogue with the remark that the most extraordinary thing is "delivering sermons at my temple." Dogen was proud that in the early thirteenth century he was the first Zen master to establish the tradition of formal sermons in Japan. The shift in meaning his response creates is intriguing in that Dogen is primarily known for his emphasis on meditation through the doctrine of "just sitting." Baizhang, on the other hand, is known for stressing the importance of monastic affairs, and his rules mention only briefly the role of sitting meditation.

Succession: Cutting and Selecting Followers

As everything comes into an orderly state for a master's leadership once disruptive people and forces have been brought under control, the master must remain on the lookout for successors who can take

over his lineage or create their own. The master is always sizing up newcomers and novices to try to determine their potential to lead while also finding ways to promote and advance the careers of long-term disciples ready to become independent.

Gateless Gate case 3, "Juzhi's 'One Finger Zen,'" is an example of a master dealing with a young monk who shows some ability but seems stuck at the stage of rote learning. Juzhi resorts to a violent "cure" for this syndrome that does, indeed, result in an experience of sudden awakening. That gives the master confidence about the novice's capacity to become a leader someday:

> Whenever master Juzhi was asked a question, he would simply hold up one finger. One time a visitor to the temple asked Juzhi's attendant about his master's teaching methods. The boy also just held up one finger. When Juzhi heard about this, he cut off the boy's finger. The boy, screaming in pain, began to run away, but Juzhi called him back. When the boy turned around, Juzhi held up one finger. The boy experienced enlightenment.
>
> Years later, when Juzhi was about to die, he instructed the assembly, "I attained One Finger Zen from my teacher, Tianlong, and have used it all my life without exhausting it. Do you understand?" So saying, Juzhi passed away while holding up one finger.

The koan also appears in a one-line version in *Blue Cliff Record* case 19, which simply says, "Whenever he was asked a question, Juzhi only held up a finger." This is an interesting editorial twist because the narrative about cutting the cat takes up two whole cases in the *Blue Cliff Record* version, but in that instance the *Gateless Gate* rendition is much more streamlined.

The Juzhi koan seems to be a primary example of Zen irreverence and iconoclasm with the severing of the finger symbolizing the pruning of all ignorance, delusions, passions, and attachment, including (or especially) a fixation with the teaching style of one's mentor. The message is reinforced by the irony that Juzhi remains consistent about his One Finger pedagogy even when the boy is screaming in pain and the master is later approaching his own death. An understanding of the irreverent dimension of discourse changes somewhat

when the case is considered in light of the featured role of self-mutilation and self-sacrifice in various forms of Chinese Buddhist practices that influenced Zen.

In addition, the supernatural elements brought out in the *Blue Cliff Record* prose commentary are crucial for understanding the case's full impact. These remarks, drawn from transmission of the lamp records, depict a nun carrying a pilgrim's staff, a revelatory dream inspiring a vision of a local protector spirit, and the incarnation of a bodhisattva. It seems that Juzhi was an obscure figure who was not well known beyond this case except as a master of incantations and other types of Buddhist mystical prayer known as *dharani*. Staying for a prolonged period in a mountain hermitage, he was approached one rainy night by a nun wearing robes and a broad rain hat and carrying a large carved staff indicative of a Zen wanderer. She walked around Juzhi's meditation seat three times and challenged him to speak before she would take off her hat.

When Juzhi failed to respond, she offered to stay the night, but only if he gave an answer. The traditional commentary does not delve into the gender implications of a female practitioner visiting Juzhi's room, in part because she represents a spirit and not an actual human. Unable on another try to give a reply, Juzhi felt inadequate and vowed to go on a pilgrimage to study the dharma, but that night another spirit told him in a dream that a bodhisattva was to appear. The next day, Tianlong arrived and taught him the One Finger training method, which converted him to the Zen school.

Therefore, the holding up and detaching of the novice's finger can be understood only in terms of Juzhi's encounters with a woman and supernatural entities. But is the master justified in his violent approach to the boy? The *Gateless Gate* verse commentary suggests that Juzhi surpasses his divine teacher, and in his ruthless yet effortless approach to discipline reminds us of a god who once split a mountain to allow the Yangzi River to pass through:

> Juzhi made a fool of old Tianlong,
> By testing a boy with his sharp knife—
> Like a Great Spirit raising its hands, and without much effort,
> Splitting into two the mighty peaks of Flower Mountain.

These remarks recall the kind of lavish praise for the pedagogical styles of various mentors represented in numerous other koan cases. But Wumen's prose commentary cautions against taking the tale too literally by playfully evoking a different violent image: "The enlightenment of Juzhi and the attendant are not based on the finger. If you really see through this, then you will have skewered Tianlong, Juzhi, the boy, and you yourself all on one sharp stick!"

However, in remarks offered in another classic collection, the commentator suggests that had he been there he would have broken Juzhi's finger, both as part of the boy's grudge and "to renew the world's energy." Another comment asks of Juzhi's act in a critical yet tongue-in-cheek fashion that contradicts Wumen's remarks: "Why did he expend so much effort?" On the other hand, the verse commentary in the *Blue Cliff Record* praises Juzhi:

> I admire old Juzhi for his appropriate teaching,
> Who else is like him throughout time and space?
> He cast down a piece of driftwood onto the ocean,
> Letting the blind turtle bob up and down while clinging to it.

Symbolic turtle. Photo by the author.

The final lines of the verse mark an allusion to a story in the *Lotus Sutra* and other sources of a huge turtle living in the deep blue sea with one eye in the middle of its belly. One day a log with a hole in it came floating by and the turtle was able to place its eye to the hole and look upward to see the sun. The message is that there is a chance in a million to be born as a human, to hear the Buddha's teaching, and to attain enlightenment. "Juzhi's 'One Finger Zen'" in its inimitable fashion provided the unique opportunity for activating such a realization in the novice, who could then go on to become a leader.

The final koan discussed in this chapter, "Guishan Kicks Over the Water Pitcher," from *Gateless Gate* case 40, is another example of a dialogue that appears to epitomize the irreverent teaching style of the Southern school through a brash act committed by an iconoclastic disciple. However, the background for the dialogue's message concerning the selection of leaders and the transmission of the lineage revolves around supernatural factors that must be taken into account for a full understanding of the case. According to the record:

> When Guishan was studying under master Baizhang, he worked as chief cook of the monastery. Baizhang wanted to appoint him abbot of a new monastery to be built on another mountain. He instructed Guishan and the head monk of the assembly to each offer a few words showing their respective understandings of the essence of Zen. The most capable one would be sent to open the new monastery.
>
> Baizhang picked up a water pitcher and set it on a rock while asking: "Without calling it a water pitcher, what will you call it?" The head monk said, "It cannot be called a wooden sandal." Baizhang then asked Guishan, who strode forward, kicked over the pitcher, and then walked away from the scene. Baizhang said, "The head monk has lost to Guishan." And so he sent Guishan forth from the monastery to open the new mountain temple.

Guishan's bold show of rebelliousness is admired and praised by master Baizhang, otherwise a stickler for following rules based on hierarchy. In the fox/monk case, Baizhang similarly allowed Huangbo to slap him. Guishan is rewarded by being selected leader of a new

temple established on another mountain, while Baizhang declares the head monk the loser of the contest. Guishan's abrupt departure from the scene indicates that he is already on his way to the other location even before the master's proclamation of his victory. Wumen's verse commentary refers to Guishan "making a direct strike that cuts off entanglements." Even Baizhang could not stand in his way as "the tip of Guishan's toe kicks about myriad Buddhas."

While this part of the philosophical message of the narrative is valid and compelling, like the case of One Finger Zen and numerous other instances, the koan can also be comprehended by considering folklore elements that form a crucial component of the background story. The case narrative is based in large part on an irregular Buddhist practitioner, who is kept hidden from the dialogue but appears in accounts originally included in several of the transmission of the lamp records.

The primary figure in this episode is neither Baizhang nor Guishan but Sima, a mysterious shamanistic monk also involved in other notable dialogues with Guishan about the meaning of the koan involving the fox/monk. Sima was known as an expert in ascetic practices and was also skilled in indigenous occult arts, such as geomancy, divination, and physiognomy. These skills were useful in selecting the leader as well as the site for a new monastic venture. How important a role the occult practices actually played in temple life of the period can only be speculated, but the presence of Sima in these records shows that supernatural elements were no doubt a strong factor in the Tang dynasty.

The importance of folklore can be seen in the *Gateless Gate* prose commentary, which says that "after careful consideration, Baizhang selected what is 'heavy' rather than what is 'light.'" The case makes it clear that Baizhang is predisposed to bypassing rank and seniority and favoring Guishan for the new leadership role. According to the narrative background, prior to the testing and evaluation of the two disciples through the water-pitcher contest, based on his occult powers Sima had already selected the chief cook for stewardship of the mountain.

Baizhang asked the geomancer to determine the fate of the new temple, which the master considered as a possibility for himself.

While Sima felt that the mountain was ideally suited to the formation of a formidable monastery with a large assembly of more than a thousand followers, he rejected Baizhang, a gaunt man with ascetic habits, whom he considered too retiring and "light" for the post. He also tested the head monk, Hualin, by asking him to cough deeply and walk three paces, and found him similarly wanting. Sima approved on first sight of Guishan, who was "a mountain of flesh" with a vigorous personality, even without putting him through an ordeal. Thus, the encounter dialogue between Baizhang and Guishan was a staged affair, with its result predetermined by the supernatural powers of Sima rather than philosophical analysis or spiritual insight in the conventional sense.

This situation is only hinted at in the *Gateless Gate* commentaries. The prose remarks suggest that Guishan "was courageous but could not escape Baizhang's trap." He was selected anyway: "How? Think about it! He removed his headband, and put on an iron yoke." The term in this passage for "think about it" also appears in the prose commentary of *Gateless Gate* case 12, in which the master cries out every night and answers the calling himself. The term suggests the practice of providing a protection from ghosts since the Chinese character is posted near graves and other sites to ward off prowling spirits.

Following this episode, according to the transmission of the lamp records, Guishan lived for several years like a hermit on the peak of the new mountain, which had previously been an inaccessible and forbidding region far from any sign of human habitation. He subsisted on wild nuts and berries, with only animals, including monkeys and birds, as his companions and friends. Nevertheless, his reputation for genuine spirituality spread and eventually the villagers in the valley below gained support from government officials in their efforts to construct for him a monastery on the mountain.

Once established, Guishan received numerous visitors seeking instruction in the dharma, including the prime minister as well as Zen monks such as Yangshan, who became his main disciple. In one sermon that emphasized a literal view of karmic causality, Guishan cautioned his followers to reject the teaching of an originally pure Buddha-nature that could never be contaminated by karmic defilements and

to strive constantly to remove evil thoughts and deeds. This sermon went against the grain of Huineng's famous verse in the *Platform Sutra* on the primal purity of human nature unaffected by karma, but it was supported by Baizhang's stringent standards in the Pure Rules.

In addition, a version of Guishan's hagiographical account further highlights the role of the supernatural. Prior to his successes in the monastery, Guishan got discouraged after eight years of solitude and decided to leave the mountain. On the pathway down, he met a friendly tiger, which appeared to beckon him to return to the peak. Guishan followed this omen and shortly thereafter his fortunes dramatically improved.

Meanwhile, in a related story, his erstwhile rival, Hualin, the former head monk of Baizhang's temple who lost the water-pitcher contest, also became a leader who was involved with taming sacred tigers. Hualin was living as a hermit on another mountain when a visitor asked if he was not disheartened by the lack of disciples compared to what Guishan had accomplished. The monk replied that he was not alone but had two attendants, and he called out for "Great Emptiness" and "Small Emptiness." In response to the call, two fierce tigers came from the back of the hermitage, roaring viciously. The visitor became terribly frightened but the tigers were instructed by the monk to be kind and courteous, and they crouched at the guest's feet like two gentle kittens.

Master Baizhang completed the selection process. He performed his task admirably as temple abbot by cultivating two disciples. Even though one seemed to win over the other, in the end both succeeded in their respective ways in opening new territory to the preaching of the dharma to all sentient beings. The lineage was perpetuated and these former followers became leaders who emulated the style of their mentor.

Baizhang, by virtue of his Pure Rules text and as featured in several crucial koan cases, played a crucial role in creating a fine balance in Zen. On the one hand, he devised monastic rules while insisting that everyone must strictly follow them, thereby submerging individuality for the sake of the group so as to impress mainstream Confucian society. On the other hand, he creatively broke the guidelines to show independence from and irreverence toward authoritarian con-

trol, as appropriate to the quest for gaining and expressing enlightenment. Adhering to stringent guidelines is reflected in Baizhang's willingness to provide funeral rites for a wild fox, whereas allowing for creativity is symbolized by accepting Huangbo's slap as well as Guishan's kicking the pitcher. In this final analysis, Baizhang knows that meditation on the peak outside the ebb and flow of temple life represents the attainment of the highest truth.

CHAPTER 6

Whither Koans, or Wither? Current Trends and Possible New Directions

Changes and Challenges

Since the onset of modernization and globalization more than a century ago, the tradition of Zen Buddhist koan literature and practice has undergone several important kinds of transition and transmutation. These shifts and modifications have generally resulted in a renewed sense of worldwide appreciation of koans as well as the growth in appeal of what could otherwise be considered an archaic, niche-based religious-literary product. But the newfound popularity of koans is probably a mixed blessing. As has been the case for many centuries, the koan tradition today still faces challenges that at once foster and threaten its survival in regard to issues generated within the monastic compound in addition to linkages with mainstream society. The first part of the chapter reviews some of the current concerns that confront the distinctive style of Zen discourse in both positive and negative ways; the negative category includes various issues related to supposed transgressions, including violations of human rights, undertaken in the name of promoting mystical awareness.

In order to thrive, the koan tradition must continue to be able to hold on to its essential meaning and function by going back to the roots of inspiration while overcoming deficiencies in practice. It can thereby reform, revive, and propagate in dynamic fashion its enduring virtues in ways appropriate and attractive in the new millennium. Current indications suggest strongly that a robust and resilient

effort is being made toward achieving the goal of reform in Japan, along with a revival of interest in Zen in post-Mao China and a new movement stressing the internationalization of koan studies in Korean Zen.

In the second half of the chapter, I briefly outline several recent trends representing reform approaches and review some recommendations for taking on new directions based on understanding classic koan sources. This segment on recommendations for the further development of the koan tradition focuses on three main areas that are of particular contemporary significance: (1) fostering greater gender balance and equality in Zen to reflect the notion of nonduality; (2) supporting the role of interpersonal relations in both professional and social environments based on traditional Zen principles, such as how doubt can constructively lead to a higher level of social awareness; and (3) establishing a greater connection between science and theology by seeking a "middle way" position that breaks through perennial ideological impasses separating subjective experience and objective observation of reality. Examples of cases are presented to show that age-old koan records can provide models for innovative approaches to speaking, knowing, and acting in public and private spheres in modern contexts.

A key to viewing koans in light of current trends and new directions is to develop a comprehensive interpretation that encompasses nearly all the various narrative, poetic, and ritual elements that constitute the complexity of classic case records. When we confront the question of how koans can revive and continue to thrive in a new social context characterized by urbanization, globalization, and the commodification of traditional cultural categories, we can look back for helpful guidance to some of the precedents already available within that conceptual structure. The lesson from the koan about the last word of Zen as discussed in the previous chapter indicates that master Deshan redeemed himself through the power of verbal communication. It is clear that in his sermon to the assembly after being scolded by a follower, he reestablished his authority through asserting the ability to command the troops. Deshan used a spiritual power wielded effectively in the channels of the monastic system's hierarchical relationships. In that instance, reaffirming and enforcing

the orderliness of the social order operating inside the temple gates found a resolution to a crisis about behavioral etiquette that threatened to topple the hierarchy. Everyone, including the abbot, must follow the rules, yet regulations are made to be broken by a master, who will not be considered a truly authentic leader unless he knows the appropriate way of doing so while responding to criticism or competing in a dharma contest. In the case involving the Baizhang water pitcher, the main result of the competition is determined by Guishan's antistructural act of breaching protocol and forsaking oratory in order to be selected as the one to establish another home outside the gates.

These examples show that rules for Zen temples are at once everything and nothing, the necessary glue that makes a delicate social fabric function smoothly and the chains in the dungeon that must be cast aside to attain liberation from all forms of bondage. Temple regulations were carefully crafted yet remain invariably arbitrary and capricious. In any event, a new or proven order needs to be created or enhanced based on the charisma and spontaneity of the spiritually awakened leader attuned to the nuances and vicissitudes of the complex social environment. But this spiritual power will not prevail unless there is a careful plan for ritual implementation both within and beyond the halls of the temple compound. The Zen abbot cannot and should not be bound by the random structure of any organization, but he must also recognize and epitomize through his behavior that he does not hold himself above the rules of the system. How is it possible to proceed in the ever-changing context of modernization while navigating a middle path between constraint and freedom? We shall now see examples that have worked well or failed famously.

Modern developments regarding the practice of koans in coming to and greatly influencing the West were grouped into several categories in a seminal short essay from the late 1950s, when the popularity of Zen along with a broader fascination with Asian culture was first taking off in postwar America, by Alan Watts titled "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen." According to Watts, "Square Zen" refers to meditation centers in the United States and many other locations around the world that try to emulate the original East Asian styles of training by adopting all the trappings and accouterments of past

practices, though still adapted somewhat to local contemporary customs. Often, however, the practitioners, Watts claimed, would not recognize that they were getting locked into a particular version of koan training as if it were the only acceptable approach when the tradition was actually characterized by diversity and plurality. This myopia can be avoided through careful historical analysis, but practitioners sometimes reject or even scorn that option as a distraction from meditation.

"Beat Zen" for Watts refers to the appropriation of Zen notions expressed in numerous koans, such as dramatic breakthroughs and exalted experiences of sudden awakening, by embracing unconventional lifestyles like traveling abroad to gain awareness of Asian society, or hiking in the mountains to commune with nature, or taking hallucinogens to heighten sensations and open what poet William Blake and thinker Aldous Huxley in a famous book published in 1954 have called the "doors of perception." While often valuable and enriching in their own right, these endeavors should not be conflated with authentic Zen reclusion and contemplation and can result in a superficiality that conceals the true meaning of koans. Watts advises all parties in the Beat and Square corners to refer back to genuine "Zen," that is, according to his analysis, the classic literature and practice as seen in appropriate historical perspectives.

Watts was aware that one of the main functions of Zen in the modern world was its impact on key developments in Western culture that would probably be included in the category of Beat Zen yet were crucial for spreading the word about the overall value of the tradition of meditation. For example, Bill Evans, a great jazz pianist significantly influenced by the minimalism of koan writings, played on recordings and live performances with Miles Davis and John Coltrane among other leading musicians at the height of the cool jazz era in the late 1950s. Evans wrote the following explanatory liner notes to the Miles Davis album *Kind of Blue* that featured one of the monumental musical collaborations of the period. What Evans says about Japanese painting and its uninterrupted directness in the now-moment affecting improvisation in other arts is very much related to key aspects of koan training:

> There is a Japanese visual art in which the artist is forced to be spontaneous. He must paint on a thin stretched parchment with a special brush and black water paint in such a way that an unnatural or interrupted stroke will destroy the line or break through the parchment. Erasures or changes are impossible. These artists must practice a particular discipline, that of allowing the idea to express itself in communication with their hands in such a direct way that deliberation cannot interfere.
>
> The resulting pictures lack the complex composition and textures of ordinary painting, but it is said that those who see well find something captured that escapes explanation. This conviction that direct deed is the most meaningful reflections, I believe, has prompted the evolution of the extremely severe and unique disciplines of the jazz or improvising musician.

Another recent feature of the globalization of Zen has been the search for comparable theoretical components in Western thought that seem to capture the essence of what a koan represents. An example of a parallel is the paradoxical biblical reprimand regarding false morality used to gain societal power, "The first will be last, and the last will be first." Another instance of comparability is Bishop Berkeley's philosophical puzzle regarding human perception, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" This query raises seemingly unanswerable issues about the ability to gain full firsthand knowledge of reality. Both examples force the mind to go beyond conventional modes of reason and verbal expression in order to attain a higher level of truth.

Another modern occurrence of a koan-like saying is a Bob Dylan lyric from the song "Ballad in Plain D," in which the narrator, who is tormented in being jilted by a lover, says he is often asked by friends, "How good does it feel to be free?" He responds "so mysteriously," "Are birds free from the chains of the skyway?" On the lighter side, one of several "Zen Judaism" injunctions says, "Though only your skin, sinews, and bones remain, and though your blood and flesh dry up and wither away, yet shall you meditate and not stir until you have attained full Enlightenment. But, first, a little nosh [snack]." Also, the

taciturn American president Calvin Coolidge, who stood in contrast to the wordiness typical of most politicians trying to convince a skeptical public to embrace their policies, is sometimes praised for his parsimonious verbal style resembling Zen minimalism. Once, when challenged about whether he could contain himself to using just two words, Coolidge responded by saying, "You lose."

Current Directions: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Various current trends affecting the function of koans in East Asia as well as on a global scale can be summed up by the famous phrase that there has been "the good, the bad," and—unfortunately, in some instances that need to be disclosed—"the ugly." This indicates a mixture of diverse factors that must be examined and evaluated before we can move forward with suggestions for the future. There are many positives involving the adoption and adaptation of case records in the modern world, especially in terms of advances in scholarship and innovations in practice as well as the applicability of koan training to contemporary philosophy and the arts. However, these areas of growth do not capture the whole story of Zen's relation to modernity. Much criticism of the use of Zen koans has emerged, some of which may be biased and unwarranted but in other ways is richly deserved and in need of urgent attention in order to reform and recast the tradition.

Newer developments in academic research methods and content have been extremely important and effective in demonstrating the extent and excellence of koan writings and training methods. Classic collections that were originally in scrolls and then began to enter print form during the Song dynasty are now being digitized, while some traditional materials additional to the classic canon are being discovered and catalogued in archives and temple storage areas from China, Japan, and Korea. As Zen has moved west, many reliable annotated translations of some of the main koan writings have been published in English. However, as previously mentioned, efforts at disseminating the voluminous body of koan writings so far merely scratch the surface, given the massive amount of resources available that are still to be worked on by Western researchers.

In addition, modern historical studies have shown a steady progression of moving away from traditional "partisan" approaches to koans affiliated with a particular school of thought, such as those stressing either minimalism and silence or elaborate rhetoric based on various literary devices. The movement is devoted to developing a neutral and holistic methodological framework based on using interdisciplinary methods for depicting major developments in koan discourse without leaning in the direction of or away from accepting any special doctrine or style of training followers through learning cases and commentaries.

By drawing on a wide range of primary sources, recent historical studies of koan literature and practice feature a mature handling of complex textual materials in a seasoned and reasonable fashion. This approach offers a critical analysis that does not pass judgment in a way that might diminish or overvalue the significance of the tradition, while also resisting the view of koans as representing a timeless truth immune to variability or verifiability. Historical examinations at once build upon and attempt to avoid the pitfalls of apologetics and skepticism by maintaining a balanced and impartial descriptive standpoint that captures the experiential meaning and significance of the religious phenomena depicted in the cases under study, whether from a scholarly or practitioner standpoint.

Japan remains the leader in promoting scholarly research on Zen, in large part because around the beginning of the twentieth century both the Rinzai and Soto sects (along with other Buddhist schools) created their own universities, Hanazono University in Kyoto and Komazawa University in Tokyo, respectively. Although these institutions started in the style of seminaries but became full-fledged secular universities after the American occupation education reforms, they retain strong Buddhist studies departments and research centers that train scholars and offer course work on Zen history and thought. The number of publications produced in Japan every year on Zen, whether dense academic material or more popular works resembling manga (comics), is phenomenal.

Recent trends in China and Korea show that these countries are quickly catching on and catching up to the Japanese standard with their own distinctive contributions to academic learning as well as

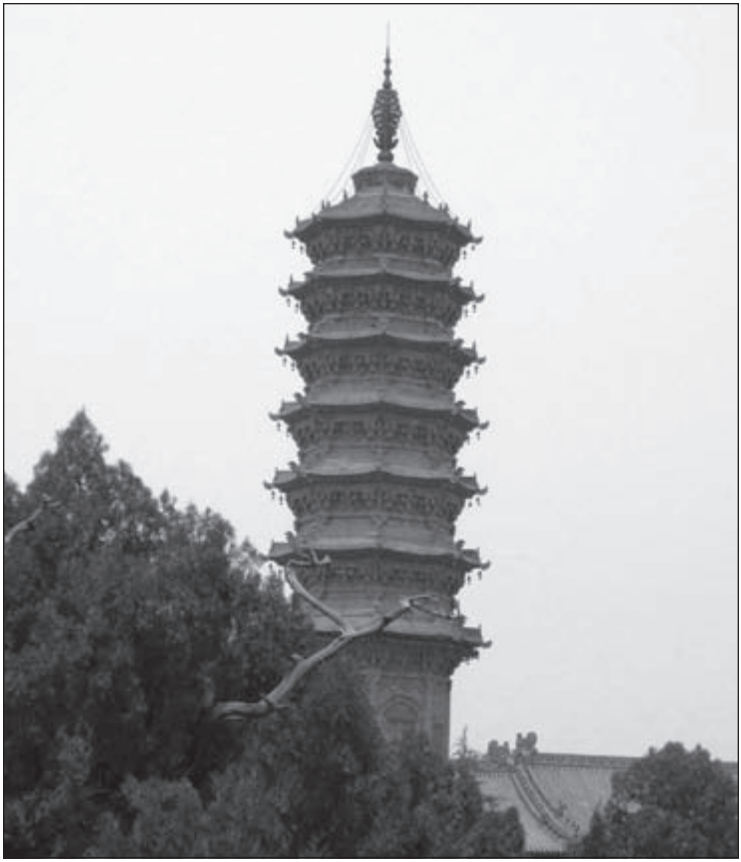
Monk snoozing in Hangzhou. Photo by the author.

popular practices in regard to the use of koans. In China, since the 1980s, there has been a steady, ongoing process of restoring the grounds and reviving monastic life at Buddhist temples throughout the country. This effort includes major Zen temples stemming from the Song dynasty in and around Hangzhou, a capital city visited by Marco Polo and a port where visitors from other parts of China and throughout Asia and the world disembarked. The presence of monks as an everyday part of society, something that was unthinkable during the Cultural Revolution, is commonplace these days.

Another example of a restored site is Cypress Grove Temple, where Zhaozhou spent the last forty years of his life and created the case about the tree standing in the courtyard in the late ninth century, as discussed in the first chapter. By the time a restoration was begun in 1987 with the aid of supporters from Japan and Taiwan, about the only shrine remaining was a large pagoda dedicated to Zhaozhou surrounded by cypress trees. During the initial celebration, it is said that a famed Japanese monk stood in front of the pagoda and growled the sound of "No" from the case about whether a dog has Buddha-nature,

but the Chinese monks, who were no longer well versed in the classics, did not understand what this meant.

Now, just three decades later, this temple located near Beijing in Hebei Province has become one of the active locations for Buddhist practice in the country through a pattern of cooperation between religion and government triggered in large part by the economic boom that comes from religious tourism. A plaque in the temple reads, "The Fragrance of the Zhao Zhou Tea Awakens One to His Nature of Mind; the Cypress Trees in the Yard Enlighten One with True



Zhaozhou's stupa. Photo by the author.

Emptiness." Furthermore, scholarship on Zhaozhou's life and teaching by Chinese researchers demonstrates a remarkable depth of knowledge about traditional sources in the field. It is no longer necessary to rely on Japanese Zen scholars since the Chinese have the tools and apparatus needed for advanced research.

While these instances highlight the spread of the koan tradition based on coming to terms with the mysterious sound of one hand clapping in a modern context in a positive fashion, other current trends in Zen may be considered more indifferent, if not necessarily bad. One example is the impact of the ongoing encroachment of secularism into the sacred realm, making it increasingly difficult to adhere to the strict Pure Rules and other traditional customs and worldviews endorsed by koan literature. In the modern world, purity and sanctity are often sacrificed for the sake of convenience and practicality. Furthermore, some of the syncretistic trends, such as the unifying of koans with nembutsu recitation or other types of Buddhist and non-Buddhist training techniques, may lead to a watered-down version of the tradition of studying case records if the respective traditions are not understood properly.

On the so-called bad side, critics like Mishima in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* have pointed out abuses of koan rhetoric when social or personal difficulties are masked by autocratic bombast. A similar criticism was offered by Arthur Koestler in the book *The Lotus and the Robot,* which referred to koans as so much gibberish and gobbledygook. While Mishima was a self-proclaimed Shinto nationalist who rejected Buddhism as a foreign ideology, Koestler was a Eurocentric Christian who was disappointed by a mystical journey he made to India and Japan since he felt that meditation was suppressing rather than releasing spiritual freedom. Therefore, their comments can easily be dismissed for representing foregone conclusions.

Unfortunately, but inevitably given the foibles and pitfalls of human nature, there has also been an ugly side of Zen koan discourse, revealed all too clearly in the modern era. This has manifested in three main areas. The first has been referred to by Brian Victoria as *Zen at War,* the title of a book from the late 1990s that severely lambasts the way quite a few Zen masters capitulated to pre–World War II Japanese supernationalism and militarism. Doing so makes them

complicit in the atrocities of the Rape of Nanjing, which occurred in 1937 and led to the murder of several hundred thousand Chinese civilians, in addition to the exploitation of comfort women (women of indigenous populations forced into prostitution) recruited from Korea and other parts of Asia. These women, who were exploited throughout the war, and their descendants still seek reparations today, or at least acknowledgment of the wrongdoings suffered, which is admitted by Japanese authorities only with great reluctance. Victoria documents how koans like Linji's saying, "Kill the Buddha," were all too readily distorted into cries for war uttered by monks who were being retrained on temple grounds as soldiers to be sent off to battle. Although there has been good cooperation between Zen leaders from China, Japan, and Korea in the postwar period, tensions from the World War II atrocities continue to plague relations between the three countries.

Another example of the misuse of classic koan literature in the modern world has been the involvement of Zen and other schools of Buddhism in the problems of social discrimination in Japan. Japanese society has long had a community of marginalized people known today as the Burakumin, who have been treated as second-class citizens and relegated to menial labor paying a meager income. The history of discrimination, officially outlawed as long ago as the 1870s, is long and complex, but one issue that came to light over the past few decades concerns the role of funerals. During Buddhist burial rites, which almost all Japanese, including outcasts, undergo, the deceased is assigned a posthumous ordination name, making him, in effect, a Buddha before his send-off into the next world. When this practice is dispensed to Burakumin corpses, they are given names that are deliberately designed to reveal their lowly social status in a kind of coding in which the label "beast" is surreptitiously inscribed. This ritual still requires a substantial donation from the deceased's family, even as the problematic names are engraved on the tombstones.

An additional area of ugliness in modern Zen revolves around accusations of sexual abuse, especially by Asian-born masters administering koan exercises to eager American followers. One prominent case came to light in the fall of 2012, when the Roshi (master) in

question was already 105 years old. The Roshi was accused by numerous parties of taking advantage of some of his female disciples during their private koan interview sessions over the course of thirty years. Apparently, the Roshi had designed a special kimono for women to wear during this practice that allowed him easy access to grab and grope under the banner of addressing their doubt syndromes. In a *New York Times* article about this scandal, a longtime male practitioner and apologist for the Roshi claimed:

> What's important and is overlooked is that, besides this aspect, Roshi was a commanding and inspiring figure using Buddhist practice to help thousands find more peace, clarity and happiness in their own lives. It seems to be the kind of thing that, you get the person as a whole, good and bad, just like you marry somebody and you get their strengths and wonderful qualities as well as their weaknesses.

Can the scars from the actions the Roshi committed over many years be rationalized in this manner, especially when we consider that he was by no means the only teacher who took advantage of his position of authority and power?

In Korea, a rise in the popularity of Zen over the past decade or so has brought formerly isolated Korean Buddhism much closer to everyday life through meditation retreats, recreational yoga, or temple-stay programs, which are now a familiar routine in the lives of many people within and outside Korea. However, a recent scandal involving gambling Buddhist monks erupted at a difficult time for the proponents who were spreading Korean Buddhism globally. According to expert Robert Buswell of the University of California, Los Angeles, "It is leaving a terrible impression abroad about Korean Buddhism and can only undermine the serious attempts the Jogye Order has made in recent years to globalize Korean Buddhism." Therefore, the general Korean public is still reluctant to hold Buddhist monks in high esteem, as they are regularly seen engaging in behavior unbefitting their calling, such as drinking in public and driving expensive cars purchased with donations from believers. In this instance, a lack of government oversight of temple budgetary affairs may indirectly lead to the problematic conditions that have unfolded.

In considering the various social issues of militarism, discrimination, and sexual or financial misconduct—all of which obviously break the strict behavioral codes of the Vinaya and Pure Rules—another commentator has pointed out that the question of evaluating transgressions in relation to goodness becomes a new koan, which "is painfully baffling." The observer notes:

> How could an enlightened Zen master have spouted such hatred and prejudice? The nub of this koan, I would suggest, is the word enlightened. If we see enlightenment as an all-or-nothing place of arrival that confers a permanent saintliness on us, then we'll remain stymied by this koan. But in fact there are myriad levels of enlightenment, and all evidence suggests that, short of full enlightenment (and perhaps even with it—who knows?), deeper defilements and habit tendencies remain rooted in the mind.

It seems that devotees of any spiritual belief will always be able to find a way to let their misbegotten leaders off the hook, and that effort may be a shameful cover-up or have a silver lining by forging a spiritual path from transgression to redemption. There is no point in throwing the baby out with the bathwater by condemning a whole tradition for the excesses of a relative handful of transgressive monks. At the same time, it is crucial to keep one's observational eyes open and attuned to the distinctive features of ethical problems and responsibilities that may be rooted in part in the vagueness and ambiguity in regard to moral guidelines on the part of koan rhetoric and practices. It is also important to actively advocate forms of repentance for misdeeds and to look for ways that deficient tendencies can be transformed by Zen leaders into constructive outlets of expression and activity in relation to mainstream society.

New Directions: Women, Interpersonal Relations, and Science

Therefore, after acknowledging examples of human rights abuses, it is important to highlight the way the positive features of the tradition of koan literature and practice can be utilized in a modern context in relation to areas such as women's roles in religious training, the role of interpersonal relations guided by principles of Zen insight, and

the question of harnessing science and technology from the standpoint of Buddhist spirituality. Koan case records can provide considerable insight and wisdom that is useful, if appropriately adapted, in encountering thorny contemporary societal and ideological issues regarding gender, professional etiquette, and the side effects of technological advances.

With regard to gender roles, we have seen a couple of prominent examples of cases featuring lay women who outsmart prominent male Zen teachers, including "Zhaozhou Checks Out an Old Woman" and "Deshan and the Woman Selling Rice Cakes." In both instances, the women were older, irregular practitioners who happened to be met by male monks on the side of the road. "Moshan Opens Her Mouth," a case mentioned in some of the transmission of the lamp records as well as a chapter of Dogen's *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* features a full-fledged priestess who gains the upper hand over her male counterparts. While the case of Moshan is an exceedingly rare—and for some of the mainstream classic Zen writings, the only—example of a female who is a properly authorized practitioner, additional lesser-known collections from the period do contain other examples of women clerics and their exploits.

Before considering the case involving Moshan, let us first look at another koan, "Zhaozhou Recites the Sutras," in which the venerable master seems to be bested by a nonmonastic elderly female:

> In the district of Zhaozhou, an old woman sent a message to the master with a donation and a request that he recite the entire collection of Buddhist sutras. Hearing of this, the master stepped down from his seat and walked around the chair one time. Then he said, "I have finished reciting the collection of sutras." The messenger returned to the old woman and told her what happened with Zhaozhou. The old woman said, "I asked Zhaozhou to recite the complete collection of sutras. Why did he recite only half the sutras?"

The woman is clever, but is Zhaozhou in the wrong in terms of how he handled the unrealistic command? Typically, Dogen's interpretation reverses the conventional reading of the case. He argues that Zhaozhou walking around his chair really did represent the

whole of the Buddhist sutras, whereas the old woman was merely lost in her concern for the relative number of scriptures recited. At the same time, in contrast to this line of interpretation that is critical of the old woman, Dogen suggests that perhaps she really wanted to see Zhaozhou walk around the chair backward, or in the opposite direction, in order to unveil his appreciation of absurdity.

There are several other versions of the narrative culled from various records of the transmission of the lamp. In one rendition, a different master also walks around the chair, but this time the old woman is criticized for not saying, "I asked him to recite the entire collection of the sutras. Why did the master worry himself so much?" In another version, master Dongshan first bows to the messenger, who returns the gesture, but then he circumambulates the chair with the officer and asks, "Why can't you understand that I have read a sutra with you?" In addition, Dogen relates how his Chinese mentor Rujing, who was once asked to read a lengthy sutra, delivered a sermon by drawing a big circle in the air with his ceremonial fly whisk and saying, "Now I have read it."

In the narratives about sutra reading, the focus remains on how well, or not, men responded to a woman's inquiry, but the case about priestess Moshan places emphasis on the role of an accomplished female cleric who is equal to the tasks of her male colleagues. As in many other examples, the breakthrough experiences are gained through a series of shrewd wordplays that also draw upon folklore mythology regarding magical shape-shifting foxes. These dialogues are carried out in Moshan's repartee with a monk ordered by his master to seek out her teaching:

> His master, Linji, sent a monk to study with Moshan. On their first meeting she asked, "Where have you come from?" The monk answered, "The Mouth of the Road" [the literal meaning of the name of his village]. Moshan retorted, "Then why didn't you close your mouth when you came here?" The monk prostrated himself and became her disciple.
>
> Some time later he challenged her by asking, "What is the Summit of the Mountain [the literal meaning of the name of Moshan]?" She replied, "The Summit of the Mountain cannot be

> seen." "Then who is the person on the mountain?" he demanded. "I am neither a male nor a female form," she responded. "Then," he asked, "why not transfigure into some other form?" "Since I am not a fox spirit, I cannot transfigure," she replied. Once again, the monk bowed and decided to serve as supervisor of Moshan's temple garden for three years, proclaiming her teaching the equal of Linji.

There are also other versions of the case narrative in various transmission records that have different outcomes and ways of treating the question of whether the monk in the end deferred to the authority and superiority of the nun, whose wisdom is expressed through ingenious philosophical puns.

This case mixes a number of fascinating supernatural and ritual elements to convey a message about nonduality as applied to gender issues. The dialogue focuses on the role of the nun as a teacher of men. She is recommended and therefore sanctioned by one of the leading patriarchs, an honor that other female practitioners were routinely denied. When Moshan opens the dialogue with the standard query, "Where have you come from?" which refers not so much to geography or place as to psychology or state of mind, the monk replies with a pun on the name of his hometown. She responds with a sarcastic put-down resembling the approach of Zen grannies in other cases. The monk tries a comeback by making a pun on Moshan's name, and she responds with an affirmation of transcendence of gender differentiation while making an ironic repudiation of fox imagery.

The reference to the fox alludes to a famous story in the *Lotus Sutra* of a dragon princess who is able to change her sexual identity in order to prove her enlightenment, but this ability in the end only highlights her nonhuman or supernatural status. Moshan, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate that her accomplishments are not based on a display of magical skills. Yet this denial is made possible by virtue of widespread belief in the powers of shape-shifting animal spirits. In the end, the monk submits to Moshan and works for her, at least for a few years. In an epilogue to the dialogue he declares, "I was given half a ladle of water by Linji and another half a ladle by

Moshan. Now that I have drunk a full ladle, I have nothing more to seek further."

A related story recorded in various transmission records deals with whether a nun should be allowed to enter the main sermon hall to preach. The master asks a female cleric who wants to open the hall to demonstrate a supranormal power so as to prove herself worthy of the honor, but she refrains from doing so although presumably she could have if she had wished. Ironically, the refusal to perform puts her in higher regard than an actual demonstration, and she is given entrée. But in general, Zen literature is ambiguous about whether a woman can instruct a man if she has not previously taken her teaching from a monk and become legitimate in one of the accepted lineages.

Dogen's commentary supports the capacity of Moshan, who is ordained. He severely attacks monks who reject the authority of women as "ignorant fools who deceive and delude secular people" and therefore "can never become bodhisattvas." Dogen remarks that he was struck by the "skin, flesh, bones, marrow" story of the succession story of first patriarch Bodhidharma, who interviewed four people, including a nun, before selecting his successor by transmitting his marrow.

In a recent book edited by Eido Frances Carney with contributions by American Soto school nuns titled *Receiving the Marrow: Teachings on Dogen by Soto Zen Women Priests,* eleven modern female practitioners ordained in various lineages show their appreciation for Dogen's defense of Moshan's right to claim authority. Nearly eight hundred years after Dogen's groundbreaking approach, the women priests expound on the meaning of different chapters of the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* including the one on Moshan, "Receiving the Marrow through Veneration." The authors each analyze key passages both in terms of their significance for realizing the dharma and in light of how the words from Dogen's classic text reflect ideas and imagery of today's world.

All of the contributors were born and trained in the West, with several also having practiced for a time in Japan. The role of modern women clergy trained by male Soto Zen teachers interpreting Dogen's body of work that expressed an egalitarian view in the context of

traditional Japanese society's repressive approach to gender issues makes an important contribution. As Carney explains, "This collection . . . is not a feminist treatise but an extension of the right and just equality that belongs to all sentient beings." Therefore, the essays are not *about women,* but *by women.* Despite Dogen's rhetoric regarding gender equality, it is still very much a matter of historical debate about whether and to what extent monks in traditional China and Japan would have placed themselves in a position to receive the marrow and bow to their female counterparts. The essays included in this volume demonstrate that it is high time for such a process to take place, and that koan cases can play a pivotal role in that process.

Zen koans are also applicable to the world of professional development involving work motivation and leadership skills attained through polishing and perfecting one's understanding of interpersonal relationships. In recent years, many ancient spiritual traditions have been mined for insight as to how to deal with complex situations in today's business and commercial environments. Books have portrayed Jesus as a CEO and Aristotle as the head of a major corporation as well as more minor figures ranging from Esther in the Bible to Attila the Hun as models for leadership. East Asian art-of-war strategies, including works like *The Book of Five Rings* by Zen meditator and swordfighter Miyamoto Musashi, have also been cited extensively and are required reading for executive boardrooms and military war rooms.

The main contribution Zen makes to this area of personal growth lies in showing how to follow and when to bend or break the rules of social conventions. As one of the prime examples of the appropriation of the koan tradition for this purpose that was noted in the first chapter illustrates, before he died Steve Jobs attributed much of his success, as summed up in the celebrated motto "The journey is the reward," to studies of koans as mysterious mental maneuvers when he was struggling early in his career. A reviewer of Walter Isaacson's biography of Apple's most visionary and productive innovator notes, "Isaacson does a fine job of showing how Jobs' engagement with Buddhism was more than just a lotus-scented footnote to a brilliant Silicon Valley career. As a young seeker in the '70s, Jobs did not just dabble in Zen, appropriating its elliptical aesthetic as a kind of exotic

cologne. He turns out to have been a serious, diligent practitioner who undertook lengthy meditation retreats."

Furthermore, the reviewer writes, "Like a Zen fussbudget, Jobs paid precise, meticulous, uncompromising attention to every aspect of the user experience of Apple's products." It is impossible to know exactly what koans were studied, but the observer speculates that during his early practice Jobs probably learned of a classic Japanese Zen master's tautological dictum, "What is attention? Attention means paying attention!"

Another koan that could have served as a template for the formation of Jobs's distinctively pioneering work ethic is *Blue Cliff Record* case 4, "Deshan Carries His Bundle." This case is a classic example of an encounter dialogue between two masters. Guishan, one of Baizhang's two main disciples, once kicked over a water pitcher as a bold and effective show of antistructural wisdom, but here he represents the epitome of monastic order by leading a mountain temple. Deshan, prior to his enlightenment experience under mentor Longtan, came to challenge and test master Guishan with his own display of an irreverent, tables-turning manner. The narrative can be interpreted symbolically as what transpires in the workplace between idealistic youth and experienced elders or as an intrapsychic debate between the uncompromising and more practical sides in a professional's motivational development and leadership skills.

A key to understanding the case is the ritual context of the monastic institution, for which rules of etiquette regarding proper dress and behavior were prescribed in great detail. The Pure Rules, attributed to Baizhang, who lived in the ninth century, was not published until 1103. But it is safe to assume that codes of conduct regulated the attire as well as the attitude of monks visiting a temple, including their entrance into the sermon hall, the central structure of the monastic compound, and their greeting with the resident master. The following excerpt cites several main components of the koan, including the introductory pointer by Yuanwu, the main case, with Yuanwu's capping-phrase comments in italics following each line in addition to Xuedou's brief exclamatory insertions, and a portion of Yuanwu's prose commentary:

(1) Pointer by Yuanwu:

Standing out under the blue sky and in the open sunlight, it is not necessary to point to the east or to point to the west. But based on temporal conditions, we still must respond to a disease with the appropriate cure. Now, tell me, is it better to go with the flow or to hold fast? As a test, consider the following. Look!

(2) Main Case with Yuanwu's Capping Phrases:

Deshan came to see Guishan. *Look at him carrying a board on his shoulder. That wild fox spirit!*

He carried his bundle into the sermon hall. *This can't help but cause people to doubt him. He has already suffered his first defeat.*

Then he crossed from the east side to the west side, and again from the west side to the east side. *He possesses the power of Zen, but what good does it do him?*

He looked around and said, "No one is here. There's nothing here," and then he left. *Give him thirty blows of the staff! His spirit reaches up to the heavens, but only a real lion cub can roar like a lion.*

[Xuedou comments: "He checked things out!"] *What a mistake, after all.*

But when Deshan got to the gates of the temple he thought to himself, "I really should not be so crude." *Letting it all go, or taking it all in? At first too high, and then too low. When you realize the error of your ways, you should try to correct them. But how many people are capable of doing this?*

So he entered the sermon hall once again, with full ceremony, to greet the master. *He acts the same way as before. This must be his second defeat. Watch out!*

Guishan just sat there. *He's watching that fellow with steely eyes. It takes someone like this to grab a tiger by the whiskers.*

Deshan held up his meditation mat, and said, "Master." *Switching heads and changing faces, he stirs up the waves even though there is no wind.*

Guishan reached for his fly whisk. *See what kind of person he is, setting his strategy in motion even while remaining in his tent. Nothing can stop him from cutting off the tongues of everyone in the world.*

Deshan cried out, shook his sleeves, and abruptly left. *This is the understanding of a wild fox spirit. In one shout, he expressed the provisional and the real, the illuminative and the functional. Among all those who can grab onto the clouds and grasp at the mist, he alone is uniquely skilled.*

[Xuedou comments: "He checked things out!"] *What a mistake, after all.*

Deshan turned from the sermon hall, put on his straw sandals, and departed. *The landscape is charming, but the case is far from over. Deshan kept the hat covering his head, but lost the shoes covering his feet. He's lost any chance he may have once had.*

That evening Guishan asked the monk in charge of the meditation hall, "Where is the newcomer who was with me earlier?" *He lost his footing in the east and gave up following the trail in the west. His eyes are gazing to the southeast but his heart is in the northwest.*

The head monk said, "At that time he turned away from the sermon hall, put on his straw sandals, and departed." *The spirit turtle is dragging his tail and deserves thirty blows. How many blows to the back of the head does it take for him to get it?*

Guishan said, "After this he will dwell on the summit of a peak all by himself, and build a hut where he scolds the Buddhas and reviles the patriarchs." *Guishan draws his bow after the thief has already fled. No patch-robed monk in the entire world will be able to follow after Deshan.*

[Xuedou comments, "He adds frost to snow."] *What a mistake, after all.*

(3) Prose Commentary Selection by Yuanwu:

When immersed in this kind of Zen, even if the myriad appearances and forms, heavens and hells, and all the plants, animals, and people all were to shout at once, he still would not be bothered. Even if someone overthrew his meditation seat and scattered his congregation with shouts, he would not give it any notice. It is as high as heaven, and as broad as the earth. If Guishan did not have the ability to cut off the tongues of everyone on earth, at that time it would have been very difficult for him to test Deshan. If he were not the enlightened

> teacher of fifteen hundred people, at this point he would not have been able to explain anything. Guishan was setting strategy in motion from within his tent that would settle victory over a thousand miles.

An examination of the case narrative indicates that Deshan was originally a member of the Vinaya order (this was a different sect based on monastic discipline, whereas Zen was based on meditation) and was also known as a specialist in the *Diamond Sutra*. He first became part of the lineage of master Shitou, which had a Northern school orientation and later gave rise to the Soto school. This eventually became the main rival to the Rinzai school, which epitomized the Southern school approach based on the teachings of Mazu. Therefore, Deshan represented what was at the time the primary rival to the lineage represented by Guishan.

The main difference between approaches was that the Northern school put an emphasis on the interpretation of scriptures or sutras and on a more gradual method of attainment through prolonged meditation. The Southern school emphasized sudden enlightenment perfected through everyday activities, such as communal labor, as well as a valorization of silence. Several koan records show how Deshan was traveling south to investigate the Southern school with the intention of "going to raid their dens and caves and exterminate the whole crew, in order to do justice to the compassion of the Buddha." While the case about the rice cakes shows an elderly laywoman giving Deshan his comeuppance, the current narrative indicates that Guishan acknowledges Deshan as a worthy adversary who will soon be able to open and establish his own independent mountain. Therefore, this koan endorses a multibranched approach to Zen lineal transmission that tries to find balance and harmony regarding the antinomies of idealism and realism, or innovation and experience.

By carrying his bundle into the sermon hall, Deshan shows that he is full of self-confidence and thinks of himself as invincible. He is willing to disregard the regulations by intruding upon sacred territory. He passes to and fro as if he enjoyed perfect freedom to do as he pleased. Then he thinks better of his brash actions and returns to the sermon hall in a courteous and ceremonial manner. Guishan responds

by reaching for his fly whisk, the main symbol of a master's authority and charisma, which proves an ineffective technique. Deshan abruptly leaves, but this time his unbending approach marks him as the apparent winner in this contest. Guishan acknowledges the merit of Deshan's irreverence, although the comments by Xuedou, the original compiler of the cases in the *Blue Cliff Record,* indicate that his words of praise come too little and too late.

The aim of the capping phrases is to comment ironically on the encounter, first by questioning Deshan, who is repeatedly demeaned as a "wild fox spirit" and a deceiver who carries a "board on his shoulder" and cannot move beyond a narrow, one-sided perspective. The capping-phrase commentary also refers to Deshan as a "spirit turtle," which means that he leaves a trail behind after his travels. When a turtle lays eggs in the sand it covers them to hide them, but as it leaves, its tail makes a track, revealing the hatchlings' nest. This is similar to a Zen saying that you can hide a body but the shadow is still revealed. In the commentary, Guishan is praised as a kind of general who sets strategy in motion while remaining inside his tent. Yet at the end of the main case, the capping-phrase commentary reverses itself and critiques Guishan as someone who "draws his bow after the thief has already fled."

Meanwhile, the prose commentary (in a section not translated here) is characteristically ambivalent about the winners and losers of the case. The commentator remarks, "People say that Guishan was afraid of Deshan, but he was not flustered at all. It is said, 'One whose wisdom surpasses a bird's can catch a bird, and one whose wisdom surpasses an animal's can catch an animal, and one whose wisdom surpasses a man's can catch a man.'" Then, this section of commentary suggests, "Deshan turned his back on the sermon hall, put on his straw sandals, and departed. Now, tell me, what was his meaning? Tell me, did Deshan win or lose? In acting as he did, did Guishan win or lose? In saying 'He checked things out' two times, Xuedou was like a bystander judging the two men."

Finally, Yuanwu's prose commentary casts doubt on Guishan's approval of the intruder: "Deshan could scold the Buddhas and revile the Patriarchs, but he would still never escape that cave. The marsh is so wide it can hide a mountain, and the cat is swift enough

that it can subdue a leopard." While the commentaries are characteristically vague and elusive about the results of the dharma combat, it appears that both parties did their job well. Deshan the innovator forced himself to be polite while remaining firmly committed to achieving perfection, and Guishan the leader calmly accepted and appreciated the flash of youthful exuberance without getting flustered or losing his cool.

The Zen message for modern times is that in the pursuit of outstanding achievement in their professional realm, leaders must have the courage to bend to creative employees, who in turn need to show the courage of their convictions. Passivity is the basis for a novel kind of dynamism. After selecting Jackie Robinson as the first African American to play in baseball's major leagues, Branch Rickey, the Brooklyn Dodgers' president and general manager, was asked, "Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who is afraid to fight back [against prejudice]?" Rickey replied, "I want a ballplayer with guts enough *not* to fight back."

A third area of inquiry involving contemporary appropriations of koan literature and practice involves applying Zen thought to several issues about the relation between theology and science and between theology and technology. There are several aspects of these linkages. First, Zen practice is known for what seems like an inherently ecological training style. For example, the chief cook of the temple, who is so busy that he is generally exempted from other chores and meditation, is instructed when preparing the meal to follow the saying, "Not a single grain of rice left uneaten and not a monk left wanting for one more grain." This can serve as good advice in the modern world, where new technologies produce a surplus of food and other products that are often consumed merely for avaricious purposes.

Another aspect of Zen's relation to science has been referred to as the "convergence thesis," which argues that there is a profound parallel between the so-called new physics and traditional Zen views of reality. Many of the conceptual developments of twentieth-century science have replaced the conventional mechanistic and materialistic Newtonian-Cartesian model with a dynamic and holistic understanding of reality based on quantum theory. Previously, science was seen as

striving for objective and predictable knowledge independent of the subject, while the goal of religion was based on subjective, personal, and variable experience unbound by objectivity. The convergence thesis argues that contemporary science necessarily contains a subjective component as well, by recognizing human involvement in all types of investigation and experimentation. This outlook, reflecting what one physicist has called the notion of the "participatory universe," seems to resemble Zen views in regard of the unity of human beings and nature, or individuality and universality. In the case of using koan practice, this represents a state of mind attained through contemplation rather than scientific observation.

Perhaps the most intriguing connection between Zen and science is reflected by the phrases "Philosophy for an age of death" and "The Buddha or the bomb?" According to this standpoint, modern thinkers such as Nishitani Keiji of the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy use Zen teachings to create a critique of modern science that has enabled the Frankenstein of technology to create the threat of nuclear holocaust. Concerns about the impact of nuclear power are perhaps more keenly felt on Japanese soil, which was the only victim of an atomic bomb (in 1945) and also suffered from the Fukushima nuclear meltdown of 2011. As physicist Werner Heisenberg has lamented, "For the first time in the course of history modern man on this earth now confronts himself alone."

According to Nishitani's critique, through science and technology man has been led to distance himself from the natural surroundings so that nature becomes a mere resource to be used rather than a spiritual realm that is experienced. Man and nature are seen as polarized entities in conflict with each other, and this impasse results in abuses of the environment, ultimately causing the threat of extinction of the human race by its own (un)doing. Therefore, modern science needs to be transformed by appropriating the significance of the notion of the participatory universe from a Zen perspective through remedial actions carried out effectively in addition to expressions on a theoretical level.

Nishitani examines several noted Zen koan cases concerning the mythical eschatology of the great fire, a theme that harks back to

sermons of the Buddha that were in turn influenced by the Indian cyclical view of creation-destruction-regeneration. This legend can be seen as symbolically analogous to the imminent possibility of the cosmic conflagration that science and technology can wreak. According to *Blue Cliff Record* case 29, "Dasui and the 'Kalpa Fire,'" "A monk asked master Dasui, 'When the great conflagration at the end of the eon is inflamed and the whole universe will be destroyed, I wonder if it will also be destroyed or not.' Dasui said, 'It will be destroyed.' The monk said, 'If so, will it be gone with the rest?' Dasui said, 'It will be gone with the rest.'"

According to Nishitani, the master's response suggests that "it" refers to the inner dimension of self-realization rather than the external universe. He thereby gives an existential interpretation to the myth whereby the scientific and/or apocalyptic possibilities are understood as the subjective experience of our here-and-now encounter with the cycles of reality. The introductory comment by Yuanwu cautions that even when sounds are heard and forms are seen, that does not mean that the perception of phenomena is clear or that an understanding of their significance is firm. The capping phrase asks, "What is this 'it'—no one on earth can comprehend it," not least of all, for Nishitani, the majority of modern scientists.

In a similar koan, a master responds to the question, "How is it at the time of the all-consuming fire?" by saying, "An unspeakably awesome cold." The paradoxical reply, Nishitani argues, indicates that the standpoint of the emptiness of all conceptual categories may serve as a basis for the unification of the two contradictory elements of teleology and mechanism, or objectivity and personal investigation, so that they are enabled to interpenetrate each other as "a wooden man sings and a stone woman dances."

Another koan that could be included in a Zen-based critique of modern science is *Blue Cliff Record* case 43, Dongshan's "Cold and Heat" (this Dongshan is the founder of the Soto school): "A monk asked Dongshan, 'When cold and heat overwhelm us, how should one avoid them?' Dongshan said, 'Why not go to a place where there is neither cold nor heat?' The monk said, 'What kind of place is it where there is neither cold nor heat?' Dongshan said, 'When it is

cold, the cold kills you; when it is hot, the heat kills you.' " The master's responses seem to encapsulate the typical Zen view that the answer to any and all situations, including a cosmic fire and/or a frozen landscape—either possibility may seem plausible in the era of global warming—is to sustain rigorously the middle-way path, which explores and embraces all extreme perspectives while clinging to no particular viewpoint.

Nishitani suggests that the deficiency of technology points to a dimension beyond its as-yet underlying science. Therefore, a question of authentic subjectivity influencing ethical choice can be positively affected only through the contemplative gaze that is free of partiality or bias in Zen koan practice. He furthermore stresses that the reconciliation of science and religion requires an existential transformation whose necessary ethical corollary is the bodhisattva's selfless compassion based on the insight into the interdependence of self and world.

However, Nishitani does not offer a specific illustration of a Zen-oriented technology, nor does he propose a concrete ethics to guide actual decision makers in the type of personal transformation necessary to deal with specific ecological and social issues caused by technology. In the final sequence of Kurasawa's highly allegorical film *Dreams,* after a nuclear disaster a young man stumbles on an idyllic "waterwheel village" in the forest, where all of the inhabitants' activities are in harmony with the environment and they live life to a ripe old age. However, this utopian ideal is not a goal that will ever be achieved.

Yet, the philosophy of Nishitani and the imagery of *Dreams* do recall and reinforce the admonition of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the leader of the Manhattan Project, which created the bomb dropped during World War II. After seeing the terrible destruction wrought by this weapon once Hiroshima was a victim, Oppenheimer, who had studied Asian philosophy in college, confessed that science had committed sin and was in need of redemption. Sometime later, he reflected, "We [scientists], like all men, are among those who bring a little light to the vast unending darkness of man's life and world. For us as for all men, change and eternity, specialization and unity, instrument and final purpose, community and individual man alone,

complementary each to the other, both require and define our bonds and our freedom."

Inconclusive Conclusion

The various new directions for interpreting and applying classic koan cases in a compelling fashion for contemporary contexts reveal ways that the tradition remains vibrant and relevant. However, koans are by definition open-ended and variable, which makes them vulnerable to misinterpretation and misappropriation by those eager to exploit others. How is the line to be drawn between constructive appropriations that benefit society based on compassion and wisdom and destructive appropriations used for gaining advantage in a self-centered fashion that is antithetical to the ideals of Zen? Is beauty simply in the eye of the beholder or is there a standard of truth to be upheld?

To point to a koan-based manner of resolving—or, rather, deliberately leaving unresolved so that the trainee must determine for him- or herself the outcome—this complex issue about the best possible use of koans, let us conclude rather enigmatically by citing the following case from number 20 in the *Record of Serenity.* According to this narrative, master Fayan asks a new trainee named Dizang where he has been residing, that is, from which master's temple he had been studying. This is in the pattern of typical queries like "What is your name?" or "Where have you hung your staff?" The novice replies, "I have been traveling without design." This response refers to the practice of itinerancy, whereby a monk would go around to different monasteries in the mountains of various regions of the country in order to seek out the best teacher. During these travels, there was not necessarily a plan of action in place to let the winds of fate or karma cast the monk's odyssey wherever the teaching of the dharma might lead. An action plan would defeat the purpose of seeking out moments of spontaneous self-discovery while studying with masters.

Probing further, the master asks the purpose of this seemingly aimless wandering and the novice answers, "I don't know." We are not sure whether this response indicates a passive sense of uncertainty reflecting a lack of commitment and conviction or a more dynamic sense of purposeless wandering in pursuit of spiritual awakening.

When Fayan remarks, "Not knowing is the most direct form of knowing," it is said that Dizang for the very first time sees things clearly with his mind's eye and experiences a great enlightenment. One of the traditional commentaries remarks, "Without going outside the gate he now knows everything in the world."

And that is precisely why, according to the title of the most famous of the koan collections, the gate that seems to be an impassable barrier is, in the final analysis, gateless. It is said that during traditional times, when a pilgrim's itinerancy led him to a new temple, he was routinely kept from entering the doorway until his dedication was proved by sitting in meditation for hours or days in the elements. Both standing on the outside looking in through an opening in the gate and breaking through it are based on nothing other than one's mind. But where can one find this mind? Where, indeed?

Appendix
Koan Case Catalog

Gateless Gate Cases by Theme and Chapter

Case	*Theme*	*Chapter*
1. Zhaozhou's Dog	Expression	1, 2, 4
2. Baizhang's Wild Fox	Folklore	1, 4, 5
3. Juzhi's "One Finger Zen"	Succession	4, 5
4. The Barbarian Has No Beard	Succession	—
5. Xiangyan's "Up in a Tree"	Doubt	1, 4
6. Buddha Twirls a Flower	Succession	2
7. Zhaozhou's "Wash Your Bowl"	Monasticism	1
8. Xizhong, a Wheelmaker	Expression	4
9. Datong Zhisheng, Buddha	Succession	1
10. Qingshui Solitary and Destitute	Succession	—
11. Zhaozhou Checks Out Two Hermits	Monasticism	1, 5
12. Ruiyan Calls "Master"	Experience	3
13. Deshan Carries His Bowl	Monasticism	4, 5
14. Nanquan Cutting the Cat	Doubt	1, 3, 4
15. Dongshan's "Sixty Blows"	Monasticism	—
16. Seven-Piece Robe at Sound of Bell	Monasticism	5
17. National Teacher's Three Calls	Succession	—
18. Dongshan's "Three Pounds of Flax"	Expression	1, 4

Case	*Theme*	*Chapter*
19. Ordinary Mind Is the Way	Experience	1, 4
20. This Person of Great Strength	Doubt	—
21. Yunmen's "Dried Dung Stick"	Doubt	1
22. Mahakashyapa's "Flagpole"	Experience	—
23. Thinking of neither Good nor Evil	Folklore	3, 4
24. Detachment from Words	Expression	—
25. Sermon from the Third Seat	Folklore	—
26. Two Monks Roll Up the Blinds	Monasticism	5
27. Not Mind, Not Buddha	Experience	4
28. Long Journey to Longtan	Monasticism	4
29. Not the Wind, Not the Flag	Experience	2, 4
30. This Very Mind Itself Is Buddha	Experience	4
31. Zhaozhou Checks Out an Old Woman	Folklore	1, 4, 6
32. A Nonbeliever Questions Buddha	Folklore	3
33. This Mind Is Not Buddha	Experience	4
34. Knowledge Is Not the Way	Experience	—
35. A Woman's (Qiannu) True Soul?	Folklore	2
36. Meeting Someone on the Road	Expression	2, 3
37. Cypress Tree in the Courtyard	Expression	1, 4
38. Buffalo Passes through a Window	Doubt	1, 2, 4
39. Yunmen's "Gaffe in Speaking"	Expression	4
40. Guishan Kicks Over the Water Pitcher	Succession	1, 5, 6
41. Bodhidharma Pacifies the Mind	Experience	1, 2, 4
42. A Woman Emerges from Meditation	Folklore	—
43. Shoushan's Bamboo Staff	Experience	1
44. Bajiao's Staff	Doubt	4
45. Who Is That?	Succession	—
46. Leaping from atop a Pole	Doubt	1, 4
47. Doushuai's "Three Barriers"	Doubt	4
48. Qianfeng's "One Road"	Folklore	—

Cases by Primary Theme

Doubt, 5, 14, 20, 21, 38, 44, 46, 47

Experience, 19, 22, 27, 29, 30, 33, 34, 41

Expression, 1, 8, 12, 18, 24, 36, 37, 39, 43
Folklore, 2, 23, 25, 31, 32, 35, 42, 48
Monasticism, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16, 26, 28
Succession, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 17, 40, 45

Additional Cases Cited

Case	*Source*	*Chapter*
Baizhang Meditates on Great Sublime Peak	*Blue Cliff Record* 26	5
Bodhidharma and Emperor	*Blue Cliff Record* 1	2
Bodhidharma "Skin, Flesh, Bones, Marrow"	Transmission Records	2
Dahui's Bamboo Comb	*Dahui Record*	4
Danxia's Enlightenment	Transmission Records	Introduction
Dasui and the "Kalpa Fire"	*Blue Cliff Record* 29	6
Deshan and Woman Selling Rice Cakes	*Blue Cliff Record* 4	4
Deshan Carries His Bundle	*Blue Cliff Record* 4	3, 6
Dogen and Gemmyo	*Dogen Record*	5
Dongshan's "Cold and Heat"	*Blue Cliff Record* 43	6
Dongshan's "Three Pounds of Flax"	*Blue Cliff Record* 12	4
Fayan's "Not Knowing Is the Most Direct"	*Record of Serenity* 20	6
A Hermit's "Mountain Torrent Runs Deep"	Transmission Records	5
Hongren's Name	Transmission Records	2
Hongzhi's Enlightenment	Transmission Records	Introduction
Huike Absolves Sin	Transmission Records	4
Huineng as Barbarian	*Platform Sutra*	2
Huineng Bodhi Tree Verse	*Platform Sutra*	2
Juzhi's "One Finger Zen"	*Blue Cliff Record* 19	5
Kobun's "Bull's-Eye!"	Contemporary	2
Linji's "Kill the Buddha"	*Linji Record*	1, 4, 6
Mazu on Damei	*Mazu Record*	2
Moshan Opens Her Mouth	Transmission Records	6
Pay Attention!	Transmission Records	1

Case	*Source*	*Chapter*
Puhua's Death	*Linji Record*	5
Who Is the Reciter of the Buddha's Name?	*Zhuhong Record*	1, 2
Xuegeng's "What Is It?"	*Blue Cliff Record* 51	5
Yantou Laughs Loudly	*Blue Cliff Record* 66	5
Yunmen's "Flowering Field"	*Blue Cliff Record* 39	4
Zhaozhou Recites the Sutras	Transmission Records	6
Zhaozhou's Dog (Yes-No version)	*Record of Serenity* 18	4
Zhaozhou's "Drink Tea"	*Zhaozhou Record*	1, 2
Zhaozhou's "Four Gates"	*Blue Cliff Record* 9	Introduction

Suggested Readings

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BUDDHISM

"What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" These cryptic expressions are among the best-known examples of koans, the confusing, often contradictory sayings that form the centerpiece of Zen Buddhist learning and training. Viewed as an ideal method for attaining and transmitting an unimpeded experience of enlightenment, koans became the main object of study in Zen meditation, where their contemplation was meant to exhaust the capacity of the rational mind and the expressiveness of speech. Koan compilations, which include elegant poetic and eloquent prose commentaries on cryptic dialogues, are part of a great literary tradition in China, Japan, and Korea that appealed to intellectuals who sought spiritual fulfillment through interpreting elaborate rhetoric related to mysterious metaphysical exchanges.

In this compact volume, Steven Heine, who has written extensively on Zen Buddhism and koans, introduces and analyzes the classic background of texts and rites and explores the contemporary significance of koans to illuminate the full implications of this ongoing tradition. He delves deeply into the inner structure of koan literature to uncover and interpret profound levels of metaphorical significance. At the same time, he takes the reader beyond the veil of vagueness and inscrutability to an understanding of how koan writings have been used in premodern East Asia and are coming to be evoked and implemented in modern American practice of Zen.

By focusing on two main facets of the religious themes expressed in koan records—individual religious attainment and the role dialogues play in maintaining order in the monastic system—*Zen Koans* reveals the distinct yet interlocking levels of meaning reflected in different koan case records and helps make sense of the seemingly nonsensical. It is a book for anyone interested in untangling the web of words used in Zen exchanges and exploring their important place in the vast creative wellspring of East Asian religion and culture.

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